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Major rebuffs Scott over access to report

By Philip Webster
POLITICAL EDITOR

JOHN MAJOR sparked fresh protests over the Scott report yesterday by rebuffing a personal appeal from Sir Richard Scott, backed in the Commons by Tony Blair, to allow MPs to see it early.

The Prime Minister infuriated Labour MPs by disclosing that the 1,800-page report into the arms-to-Iraq affair had been made available "only to those ministers or civil servants who need to see it in order to help prepare the Government's response to questions in this House".

He rejected Mr Blair's call for MPs to see the report an hour before it is published tomorrow at 3.30 pm with a Commons statement by Ian Lang, President of the Board of Trade.

Tensions over the report are rising and the Opposition parties are turning their fire on the Government for what they see as the unfair advantage it has taken in seeing the report eight days before anyone else.

Mr Blair, demanding a prior sighting for MPs "in the interests of proper parliamentary democracy", was echoing a request by Sir Richard.

Christopher Murtumuhuru, secretary to the inquiry, wrote to Mr Lang on Monday, saying that Sir Richard hoped everyone with a proper interest in the report would be allowed access to it at the earliest possible moment so public debate could take place on an informed basis. Whether this would be achieved if copies were not made available before Mr Lang's statement was doubtful, he said, and Sir Richard therefore suggested that the report could be laid before Parliament an hour or so earlier.

Mr Blair asked for early publication to give MPs some chance to study it. He said the campaign to discredit Sir Richard prior to publication had been unprecedented.

But Mr Major said Mr Blair should know that was not the way governments conducted business. "The arrangements proposed are in line with the usual practice of publishing a report and making it available to honourable Members at the same time. It is precisely so Members have time to absorb and understand the report... that we have arranged a debate in Government time ten days after publication."

Paddy Ashdown, the Liberal Democrat leader, said: "How can it be right that ministers have eight days to read this report when civil servants who are criticised may not even get six hours?"

Meanwhile, the Government defeated by 19 votes a motion in the Lords from Lord Richard, the Labour peer, and Lord Jenkins of Hillhead, the Liberal Democrat leader, for more time to consider the report.

Sue Cameron, page 16

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The new faces of the General Synod: Katy Blake, Beatrice Brandon and the Rev Chad Cousmaker were among those attending the meeting at Westminster yesterday

Church of England 'turning into Lib Dems at prayer'

By Ruth Gledhill, Religion Correspondent

THE Church of England has moved from being a bastion of middle-aged, middle-class men to a body that is increasingly left wing and anti-tradition, according to a report published yesterday.

The survey of more than 500 members of the General Synod portrays a Church driven by self-doubt and concerned more with the Third World and ecology than traditional areas of Christian morality, such as adultery.

It also suggests a Church out of touch with popular opinion: no bishop admitted to reading a tabloid newspaper or to listening to Radio 1, and one said he read no newspapers at all. A majority of all three houses of the Synod — the bishops, clergy and laity — depended on Radio 4.

The survey, conducted before last year's Synod elections and published to coincide with this week's meeting of the new body at Church House in

Westminster, says that the Church's parliament is still heavily biased towards particular social backgrounds, but adds: "Some categories conventionally labelled as middle class in contemporary society are conspicuous by their absence."

And while the number of bishops following the traditional route of public school and Oxbridge is still high, it has fallen dramatically since the Second World War. Three bishops — including the Archbishop of Canterbury — left school before they were 16.

Politically, the survey shows that the Church, once described as the Tory party at prayer, is now comprised mostly of Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters. Fewer than 30 clergy were members of a political party, most of them Labour, and one bishop belonged to the Liberal Democrats. Only a quarter of the bishops or clergy voted Con-

servative in 1992, compared with 44 per cent of the laity.

Both politically and spiritually, the laity — which for the first time had a small majority of women — were less liberal-minded than either the clergy or the bishops, with a greater proportion of Tory party members and a tougher approach to moral issues. Nearly two-thirds of the laity said the Church failed to give adequate answers to moral and social problems, family life and spiritual needs, while only a third of the bishops and half the clergy agreed.

The bishops put adultery, abortion, euthanasia and homosexuality at the bottom of their list of important issues. Their priorities were Third World problems, unemployment, the environment and politics. Two bishops went so far as to say that the Church should not speak out at all on adultery and one said that it should keep quiet on

abortion. The clergy also thought the Third World, unemployment and the environment most important, as did the laity, but a higher proportion of the latter group was concerned about adultery.

The survey was conducted among the 547 members of the Synod that served from 1990-95 by Grace Davie, a sociology lecturer at Exeter University, and Christopher Short, a research fellow at Cheltenham and Gloucester Higher Education College. The work was financed by the Synod and its secretary general, Philip Mawer says in the preface that its results "show the General Synod as a body continuing to evolve as the Church of England is self-changing and seeks the better to undertake the will of Christ in the nation it serves".

But traditionalists saw the report as vindicating their criticisms of the way the Church was changing. The

Ven George Austin, the Archdeacon of York who lost his seat on the Synod last year, said: "I am beyond being depressed about the Church of England. But it is God's church and they will not win. The pendulum will swing back. People are fed-up with the trendiness of the Islington religion set. The equivalent of the Islington political set has moved into religion."

"Bishops are increasingly remote from the ordinary people. It is the politically correct chattering classes who dominate, which is why ecological sins are seen as a greater sin than the ones against the family. It is why the leadership the bishops give is so weak. The Synod has become remote from the men in the pews. I am glad that I am no longer part of it."

The former Archbishop of Canterbury Lord Cogan defended the new approach, however, saying: "It is the task

of the church to be concerned with both moral issues and the conditions of the Third World. It is a delicate balancing act. I hope this present Synod will get it right. To rush to the conclusions that the Synod have lost its moral direction would be very rash."

Lord Williams of Evesham, a member of the House of Lords Ecclesiastical Committee, accepted the broad thrust of the survey. He said: "The church is not giving any clear moral lead because it cannot. It is not structured to do so, and the

Continued on page 2, col 1

Leading article, page 17

British girl faces death for drug smuggling

By Andrew Drummond
and Carol Middleley

THE daughter of a British businessman is facing a possible death sentence after being arrested yesterday at Bangkok airport and charged with trafficking nearly 9lb of opium.

Lisa Marie Smith, 20, was detained as she was about to board a flight to Japan. According to police she "readily admitted" concealing the opium in her luggage with intent to sell it.

She told officers from the Narcotics Control Board that her father, Terence, the chief executive of National Mutual Asia in Hong Kong, had given her a six-week holiday in Thailand as a Christmas present but she had run out of money during her stay.

Last night Miss Smith was locked up in a Bangkok police cell with seven others after having photographs and fingerprints taken. Dressed in a blue T-shirt, long blue skirt and training shoes, she peered through the bars of the cell before settling down in a corner.

The penalty for drugs trafficking in Thailand is death, although no Westerner has yet been executed. Thailand resumed executions two weeks ago after a nine-year break.

Miss Smith's mother, Robin, was distraught after learning about the arrest and said her daughter had been "mixed up" recently. At the family home in Old Peak Road, one of the most affluent areas of Hong Kong, she said: "How could she do this? How could she be so stupid? I spoke to her yesterday and she said she was going to India. I begged her to come home."

Miss Smith is said to have claimed that after her cash ran out an Indian man offered her a ticket to Tokyo on Thai airlines, gave her money and handed her the opium. She was to be met at Tokyo's Narita airport and escorted by train to Yokohama.

IRA lorry bombers are on film

By Stewart Tindler
CRIME CORRESPONDENT

POLICE have captured the Docklands IRA bombers on film from closed circuit television cameras.

Photographic experts have begun scrutinising film taken last Friday as the terrorists parked the lorry bomb 90 minutes before the explosion at 7.01pm. The frames are understood to show two bombers leaving the lorry.

Scotland Yard is enhancing the quality, and the pictures will be compared with criminal records and intelligence files. Even if they are not sharp they will provide vital details of clothing, build, height and possible age. The descriptions could jog witnesses' memories.

Three years ago the police were led to Jan Taylor and Pat Hayes, members of an IRA active service unit, within hours of releasing pictures showing them planting a bomb outside Harrods. Both were jailed.

Peace process, page 2
Simon Jenkins, page 16
Letters, page 17

It's the day when Snoozypops asks for cuddle custard

By Alan Hamilton

THE TIMES relaxes its usually exacting linguistic standards today and, in the belief that true romance is still a small candle in a naughty world, permits Snoozypops to ask Diddy Wumps for snuggles and cuddle custard.

It is Valentine's Day again, when we celebrate passion and desire in the name of a celibate, martyr bishop headed in Rome for his Christian faith by the Emperor Claudius the Goth around AD 270.

Lovers and would-be lovers have hijacked his saint's day since at least the eighteenth century, probably because it falls close to the pagan fertility festival of Lupercalia, when the ancients danced in celebration of bawdy desires.

In this leap year, when tradition dictates that the initiative can be taken by the female, most of our 20 columns of heavily coded mating ritual appear to have been originated by the male, although the encryption would at times try the best brains of Bletchley Park. That the Penguin Man loves the Snow Bitch is a fairly clear piece of

gender orientation, but who wears the trousers between Babynose and Bum, Starling and Keeby, Fide and Elife, or Honeybun and Merraboots?

The Royal Mail confirms that the leap year tradition is being ignored: it expects to handle a record 10.3 million Valentine cards this year. Postal research indicates that half of all men will send a card, but only 40 per cent of women. They, it is suspected, may have gone high-tech:



"I hope Scott doesn't start poking his nose around here"

sales of BT's Easyreach pager service are said to have been especially brisk in recent months, since word spread that it was an efficient device for making secret trysting arrangements with an illicit lover.

Discriminating lovers, however, still prefer The Times, and this year appear to be gradually growing out of their inchoate nursery language. In a clear spirit of European federalism, many of this year's messages are in French and — as we would expect from such a literate and educated readership — at least one is in Latin.

No foreign-tongued message can be as impenetrable as Fossil's message of love to Wombat: "Can't wait to be dug up and brushed down. Passion and pickaxes."

But no truer love is spoken than by the anonymous sender to an equally anonymous recipient: "My love is like your daily Times — long-established, honest and true." Aaaaaah.

Oriental lovers, page 11
Valentines, pages 20 & 21
Interface, page 8

Nadir aide's trial opens

Asil Nadir, the fugitive businessman, laundered £400,000 in stolen funds through Swiss bank accounts to pay personal debts, the Central Criminal Court heard. The money was channelled from Polly Peck International.

Details of the alleged transactions emerged at the opening of the trial of Elizabeth Forsyth, former financial adviser to Mr Nadir. She denies two counts of handling £307,000 and £88,050 in stolen funds in October 1989. Page 25

Take That to go their own way

The four remaining members of Take That, the most successful British pop group of the Nineties, said in Manchester that their decision to split up was unanimous and amicable. They have sold ten million albums worldwide and had seven British No 1 singles. Pages 5, 15

Out of luck

Sales of National Lottery Instantts fell to £19.3 million last week, their lowest level. They have dropped steadily from a weekly peak of £44.4 million last May. Page 25

Be mine tonight.



Ditto.



Barrett BRITAIN'S BEST SELLING
PREMIUM HAND PULLED ALE SINCE 1777.

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Take that! Major brushes aside old discords

News that the pop group Take That is to split has apparently prompted its distraught fan club to phone Downing Street. They need advice on how to paper over cracks and to reconcile belligerents. If anyone can hold a divided group together, they reason, it is John Major.

They are wise. The Prime Minister's first instinct in the Take That crisis will be to buy time to postpone the decision until 1997. Then he will promise a White Paper on the issues and hint at a possible referendum, but in ambiguous terms. If pressed, he will set up an inquiry. He will see each member of Take That for a personal chat, one to one, authorising officials to talk separately to Mark Jackson, Gary and Howard: talks about talks. There may be hints (not from the PM himself, of course) about honours.



MATTHEW PARRIS
POLITICAL SKETCH

This column reckons Major's chance of success quite highly. Frankly, a man who has succeeded in cobbling together a Government out of some 325 treacherous, vain, greedy, scheming rats, skivers, oddballs, dimwits, deadbeats, wide-boys, fainthearts and raving lunatics — and kept the show on the road for

six years — should have no trouble with four young men who at least seem capable of taking a steady view of their own advantage. Never mind Ireland: if Major can swing this, he'll sweep the country. Tony Blair was confronted again yesterday with the questions raised by his proposal to give Scotland its own parliament. Bill Walker (C. Tayside North) complained about it to Mr Major, but the

Labour Leader remained tight-lipped. Earlier (in Opposition embarrasment) the junior health minister John Birt had responded to a question from Maria Fyfe (Lab. Glasgow Maryhill): "May I welcome the hon and Scottish lady to English Health Questions?" A Scottish parliament, of course, would take responsibility for health north of the border, but Mrs Fyfe could

continue to speak and vote on the English National Health Service. The Opposition can find no answer to the dilemma, as there isn't one. Among new-Labour MPs, the puzzle has become rather like those questions that grown-ups don't ask the vicar because they are so plonkily basic. It is left to children to enquire: "In Heaven, will Mummy be married to Daddy or to my first Daddy, who died?" Unlike with Mum and Dad, however, it is not open to Mr Blair to reply "Shut up and eat your Frosties", so he just says nothing. But how will he

solve the problem? A Scottish Labour MP suggested yesterday what could well be the answer. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) introduced a Bill for the establishment of national parks in Scotland. Mr Galbraith is on to a good idea but he is too timid. Why not make the whole of Scotland a national park? The country could be "themed" so there would even be a place for the Gorbals and other dismal, granite-hewn urban prospects. As "the Caledonian National Park", the region would no longer need MPs but a park board on which

Scotland's senior former MPs could sit while the others donned kilts and became rangers.

As P.G. Wodehouse almost wrote, it is possible to distinguish between a ray of sunshine and a Scots MP with a grievance. But in a theme park the aggrieved tone and surly countenance would be welcomed by tourists as adding to the authenticity of the experience. And the Commons would be rescued from the synchronised gripe they call "Scottish Questions".

Broken hearts, page 5
Jane Gordon, page 15

Agreement close on election plan

Bosnia-style deal could revive Irish peace talks

By NICHOLAS WATT
AND PHILIP WEBSTER

BRITAIN and Ireland were edging closer last night to a deal to keep the Northern Ireland peace process on track. The agreement would involve Bosnia-style peace talks to be followed by elections.

As John Major prepared to publish a paper setting out his ideas for elections to a 90-strong assembly, John Bruton told the Irish Parliament that he was ready to talk about elections provided they led directly to the long-desired goal of all-party negotiations. But he made plain that elections should come after the so-called proximity talks involving all parties, similar to the conference in Dayton, Ohio, that settled the war in the former Yugoslavia.

Mr Bruton also criticised the Prime Minister for the speed with which he introduced his election plan within hours of the publication of the Mitchell report on decommissioning arms last month. However, his measured criticism marked a sharp contrast from his original reaction to

David Trimble was joined by a powerful senator yesterday in demanding that President Clinton should cancel the permission granted last March for Sinn Féin to raise funds in the United States, to help put pressure on the IRA to accept a genuine ceasefire. Mr Trimble, leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, visiting Washington, said Sinn Féin had raised £970,000 in the U.S. Jesse Helms, Republican chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, said fund-raising rights should be revoked if Mr Adams failed to denounce the latest bombing.

the elections plan, when he said he feared it would "pour petrol on the flames". Mr Major, who briefed the Rev Ian Paisley yesterday on his proposals for elections, hopes to publish his plans soon. Early ideas are for the body to be made up of about 90 members from 18 multi-member constituencies. They would form three groups who would pursue peace talks with representatives of the British

and Irish Governments. Voting would be by proportional representation.

Mr Bruton, who cut off ministerial contact with Sinn Féin after the Docklands bomb, said his Government's main priority was to find ways of bringing Sinn Féin back into the full political process. But he insisted that this could happen only if the IRA restored its ceasefire.

"No Government can allow murder, or the threat of murder, to set the political agenda," he said. "Our state is founded on democratic principles... If we accept violence in one area of life then we are opening the door to the acceptability of violence in other areas of life."

However, despite his condemnation of the IRA, his mild criticisms of Britain underlined the feeling in the Irish Republic that the ceasefire might have lasted had Britain done more to reward Sinn Féin. These sentiments were spelt out by Bertie Ahern, the former Prime Minister and leader of Fianna Fáil. He said that Sir Patrick Mayhew, the Northern Ireland Secretary, bore most responsibility for the impasse.

"Can it be that we are actually seeing the re-emergence of the old situation where Irish affairs are treated as nothing more than a pawn in the British political game?" he said. "A plausible case could be made for saying that Sir Patrick's job was to manage the Northern Ireland peace process in a way that ensured the survival of the 'Tory Government' rather than the survival of the peace process itself."

Albert Reynolds, his predecessor as Irish Prime Minister, said yesterday that he believed the IRA would restore its ceasefire if a date was set for all-party talks. Mr Reynolds, whose Government helped to broker the ceasefire in 1994, was speaking after meeting Gerry Adams in Dundalk.

The Sinn Féin president said after the meeting that it would be difficult to put this back on the rails. But he came close to echoing Mr Reynolds' comments when he added: "Obviously the only way is for real talks and all-party talks. That is one of the reasons why it collapsed, because the British broke the commitment they made to bring that about."

Dick Spring, the Irish Deputy Prime Minister, called for a "process of intensive discussion" to overcome the stand-off over elections. He said that "clarifications" provided by Mr Major's statement yesterday would make it easier for the "elective approach" to be considered.

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Sue Osborne, right, who was with Miss Lombard on the day she died, helps to carry the coffin yesterday

Firefighters salute fallen colleague

By A STAFF REPORTER



Fleur Lombard: died when roof collapsed

FLEUR Lombard, the first woman firefighter to die on duty in Britain, was remembered yesterday by more than 1,000 uniformed officers from across the country, including her colleagues in Bristol, gathered for a cathedral funeral service.

Her black coffin, draped in a Union flag and bearing her yellow firefighter's helmet, was carried on a turntable ladder at the head of a cortege that marched through Derby, the city where she was born and where she first worked as a part-time firefighter.

Shoppers stood in silence as officers walked in a guard of honour to the cathedral, behind the fire appliance in

which the 21-year-old travelled to her last call-out.

Her parents, Roger and Jane, walked behind the coffin with other relatives. Miss Lombard was killed on February 4 as a roof collapsed, trapping her, as she tackled a blaze at Leo's Co-op store in Staple Hill, Bristol.

Before the service, Michael Saunders, 22, a colleague from Bristol, stood to attention at the foot of the medieval tower entrance to the cathedral holding Miss Lombard's silver axe, won after being commended as the best recruit on her training course two years ago.

Six of Miss Lombard's colleagues from Derbyshire and from Bristol carried her coffin through the cathedral. Among them was Sue Os-

borne, 23, her best friend and one of the seven remaining women employed by the Avon brigade, who was with Miss Lombard at the fire on the day she died. Alongside stood Rob Seaman, 27, who was standing with Miss Lombard as the roof collapsed on them both. He escaped with minor injuries.

Andrew Walters, Chief Fire Officer at Avon, told mourners: "We in Avon were lucky. We were the first to interview her. It is true to say that the watch were a little apprehensive. They had never had a female firefighter on the watch."

"They soon discovered their fears to be ill-founded. It was clear that Fleur was there to do the job she loved, not to make a point."

Prince speaks to bomb victim on hospital visit

By RUSSELL JENKINS

THE Prince of Wales spoke to a bomb victim who suffered more than 100 lacerations to her face when he visited the Royal London Hospital yesterday. Barbara Osei, 23, was recovering from eye surgery at Bart's Hospital but requested to return to the Royal London to meet the Prince. She is due to be released shortly.

The Prince also met the emergency teams who coped with 37 injured people — most of them cut by flying glass — when they arrived in the Whitechapel hospital's accident and emergency department. Tea and cakes with nurses and surgeons followed a visit to the concrete and twisted metal of South Quay, in the shadow of Canary Wharf, where the Prince was shown the extent of the bomb damage.

Flanked by Sir Paul Condon, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, and Commander John Grieve, chief head of the Anti-Terrorist Branch, he went to the spot where Inan Bashir, 29, a newsagent, and his friend John Jeffries, 31, died. Afterwards he met emergency service workers at Limehouse police station, where he praised the courage of police

officers injured in the explosion. Among them was PC Roger de Graaf, who first identified the terrorists' lorry as a suspect vehicle.

Sergeant Anthony Gielty, one of the first on the scene, said: "He told us all we had done a marvellous job and thanked us for our efforts. He asked us to pass on regards to PC Paul Whitting, who has damaged ears caused by the explosion."

Two bomb victims are still being treated in hospital. Zaouli Bernazzag, 55, was taken to hospital for the first time since Friday, but is being kept in intensive care on a ventilator and remains critical. The other, Ms Osei, is waiting to have stitches removed.

Almost 60 staff responded to the emergency call on Friday night, including telephoneists, porters, radiographers and managers as well as surgeons, doctors and nurses. Gerry Green, the hospital's chief executive, said the Prince's visit had boosted morale.

Mr Bashir was buried near his home in Streatham, south London, yesterday after a private family service at the Croydon Mosque.

Photograph, page 24

Newcastle officials move to force closure of school

By PAUL WILKINSON

ONE of Britain's worst schools in terms of truancy and exam failure has been earmarked for closure.

By recommending the closure of Blakelaw Comprehensive in the tough West End district of Newcastle upon Tyne, education officials have moved in advance of an inspection in October by the Office of Education Standards. Blakelaw is scheduled to close at the end of summer in 1997.

The Government's latest league tables show that last summer only one in ten pupils achieved five or more GCSE passes between grades A and C. The city's average was almost three times higher at 28 per cent, still well below the national average of 43.5 per cent. One in four of Blakelaw's pupils skipped classes.

Parents have already shown their attitude. With 563 pupils, the school is operating at little more than half its capacity. Built in 1963, it has the

smallest sixth form in Newcastle with just 18 students and only offers one A level course.

The pupils will be distributed among other schools in the area, but the 35 staff have yet to be told whether they will be re-employed.

Darren Murphy, Newcastle education committee's chairman, said: "In the end you have to take the view — is it better to wait to reverse a decline, or is it better to take firm action? Young people only get one chance at a good education and it would not be right to wait for the inevitable which would be ever-decreasing numbers forcing the school to close anyway."

Terry Cooney, the governors' chairman, said: "I don't think there is any real alternative. I would like to see the school saved but there isn't a formula that allows it."

There was distress yesterday among staff many of whom first heard the news on local radio on their way to classes. Jeffery Curd, the head-

master, called an emergency assembly. Later he said: "Everyone at the school is very shocked and saddened. There is a strong feeling that many people do not appreciate what good work is going on inside this school. A lot of very good teachers work here with children, many of whom have quite difficult circumstances."

Results survey: Independent school pupils on assisted places outscored their fee-paying classmates in last summer's GCSE and A level examinations, according to results published yesterday (John O'Leary writes).

Teenagers benefiting from the Government's scheme for low-income families had a pass rate of 94 per cent for five higher-grade GCSEs, 3 per cent better than other independent school pupils and almost twice the national average. More than half taking A levels achieved A or B grades, compared with 41 per cent for all independent schools, the Independent Schools Information Service said.

Private cash for building

PIMLICO School, a symbol of the 1960s and comprehensive education, yesterday became the first state school to seek private funding for rebuilding. The pioneering project has the blessing of Jack Straw, its chairman of governors and the Shadow Home Secretary (David Charter writes).

Tory-controlled Westminster City Council aims to find £18.5 million from commercial backers to re-design, build and manage the school under the Government's private finance initiative.

Potential bidders will be able to recoup their investment by building housing on the site or running a private sports club using the school out of hours. The school's low-rise concrete and glass design won awards when it opened in 1970 but it has quickly fallen into disrepair. Annual upkeep costs £370,000.

Windfall of £10bn for cereal farmers

Europe's beef and cereal farmers have been "overcompensated" by taxpayers to a total of £10 billion, over the past three years, the Ministry of Agriculture said yesterday (Michael Hornsby writes).

Douglas Hogg, the Minister of Agriculture, said the European Union should use the opportunity offered by farming's current prosperity to cut subsidies.

Sir David Naish, the president of the National Farmers' Union, said: "Mr Hogg has ignored the role played by the depreciation of the pound in British farmers' higher returns."

Women win case

Seventeen women health workers who missed out on a pay rise because they were on maternity leave won their claim of discrimination in the European Court of Justice. The court in Luxembourg ruled that Joan Gillespie and 16 other unnamed women, mostly nurses, clearly qualified for the increase. However, it dismissed their claim that women on maternity leave should receive full pay.

Howe on judges

Lord Howe of Aberavon is expected to warn tonight in BBC Radio 4's *Times Past*, *Times Future* of a loss of respect between politicians and judges which is fuelling clashes between them. His concern about the deteriorating relationship between the government and judges is echoed by Judge Stephen Tummim, who says relations have got worse since Michael Howard became Home Secretary.

Tag' man back

The criminal who, last year, was the first to be electronically tagged was back in court yesterday to plead guilty to shoplifting at two supermarkets. Clive Barratt, 30, of King's Lynn, Norfolk, was given a year's probation after telling the magistrates at Swaffham that he had committed the offences because he had no money to feed his three children, the result of problems with benefits payments.

Bypass evictions

Newbury bypass protesters failed to block moves to evict them from their camps, tunnels and tree-top homes. Sir John Wood, sitting as a High Court judge, ruled that the Department of Transport had been lawfully granted possession of land at Snelmore Common occupied by campaigners. The protesters had admitted that they were trespassers on the 9½-mile bypass route.

EU beef warning

Germany was given a warning that three of its provincial governments were violating European Union law by banning imports of British beef for fear of "mad cow" disease. The European Commission in Brussels gave the German Federal Government one month to offer reasons why it should not be taken to the European Court of Justice. It said the import bans violated EU free-trade rules.

Police race case

A black detective has been awarded an estimated £30,000 over an "unfair" annual appraisal by the Metropolitan Police, which he claimed affected his career and salary. Detective Constable Peter Franklin, based at Epsom, won the sum when the force settled his allegation of racial discrimination "and victimisation out of court. He has served 16 years with the Metropolitan Police.

Church now the Lib Dems at prayer

Continued from page 1
lack of the clear voice is damaging the Church. Part of the problem is that the synods, from deanery to General Synod, spend a great deal of time talking about things which do not necessarily matter. The people who serve on these bodies tend to be people who have time, money and the interest to do so. But they are not necessarily truly representative of the man or woman in the pew."

Lord Runcie the former Archbishop of Canterbury questioned the validity of the report. "I do not recognise some of the findings. The leaders of the Church of England are major players in the current debate about di-

voce reform. It is a major piece of moral legislation. They are doing what they can. But if the Synod members think the answer is to make moral pronouncements then that is within their own power."

Lord Runcie believed that priority should be given to recruitment of young intelligent people to articulate the faith of the church. "It is raising the standard of church life, in the parishes of England, which matters most."

"The closure of residential colleges, for financial reasons, creates a danger of getting clerical training on the cheap. There is no substitute for well-trained good quality clergy who are able to articulate the

problem and do something about solutions."

Peter Bruinvels, a synod member of the Guildford diocese and a former Tory MP, said of the bishops: "They need some strong leadership themselves. The problem is, they do not want to offend anybody and the result is they offend everybody. I understand it, they just want to be popular and they want to be loved."

Mr Bruinvels said that when he was first elected to the synod in 1985 he was one of four elected Tory MPs, now there is only one —

Sir Patrick Cormack. Mr Bruinvels accepted that Conservative influence in the Church was declining, but

said there were "still plenty of Tories on the General Synod."

But the Rev Andrew Burnham, vice principal of the Oxford theological college St Stephen's House, said: "I vote Labour because Labour espouses virtues of social democracy and can bring these principles into power. I don't know any Tories in the Church, although I think some might vote Tory secretly. I think there has been a move to the Left since the 1960s." The Rev Eric Shegog said the Church could no longer be seen as the Tory Party at prayer, but said the move was mainly towards the centre ground.

Leading article, page 17

Three counties defy budget limits

By IAN MURRAY
COMMUNITY CORRESPONDENT

THREE of the first four English counties to set their budgets agreed yesterday to spend more than the Government allows over the next year.

Oxfordshire and Cambridgeshire want to raise council tax beyond government limits to pay for the increase. Wiltshire is to dig deep into its reserves to finance its overspend.

The increases are only the beginning of the extra amount residents will have to pay. The final bills will include not only the figure for the county but the additional amounts levied by districts and parishes.

All three are hung councils

and the budgets for them were agreed only because Labour and the Liberal Democrats voted together against Tory councillors who wanted to stay inside the government-imposed spending limits.

Cambridgeshire decided on a £408 million budget, which is £3.8 million above its cap. If the council can now persuade the Government to approve the budget, residents will face an initial 9 per cent increase in council tax plus inevitable further rises in the amounts yet to be levied by district and parish councils.

Even if it is allowed to raise the extra money the council still plans to close four libraries and cut the other libraries' opening hours. The transport

and social services budgets will each be cut by £2 million. Cambridgeshire avoided breaking through its cap last year by drawing £7 million from its reserves, which are now so low that the auditor has advised it would be dangerous to withdraw more.

Oxfordshire voted to spend more than its cap but last night councillors were still arguing about how far to go. The Government has set a limit of £332 million for the county, which claims it needs £344 just to maintain services. Even at the capping level, council tax for the county will have to rise by 6.2 per cent before district and parish precepts are levied. The year before last Oxfordshire drew

£2.6 million from its reserves, which are down to £3 million.

Wiltshire, which had a spending cap of £330, decided to draw £5.85 million from its reserves to boost its budget to £336 million. Some savings will be made in administration, costs, but all front-line services are to be preserved. Council tax for the county will rise by 1.6 per cent.

Breaking through the cap is an expensive gamble. If councils fail to persuade the Government that they are justified, they have to rebill council tax payers at an average cost of £500,000. That so many appear ready to take the risk shows how sincerely they believe they need to raise more money to maintain services.

Windfall of £10bn for cereal farmers

Women win case

Home on judges

Desperately seeking synergy

So long then, Videotron. Or rather, Videotron. The Canadian owners of Britain's sixth largest cable television company are pulling back to Montreal, to concentrate their money in North America where they can see some reward.

It is fitting that Kenneth Baker, MP, remains on the board of the British company, which is seeking new investors to buy the Canadian stake. Videotron Holdings will continue to operate the Videotron cable franchises in London and the South East. It was Mr Baker, as Trade and Industry Secretary, who in 1981 beckoned Britain down the golden road leading to the "wired nation". Fifteen years later, however, the road is murky. British homes which have been lured by multi-channel television have chosen, by about four to one, to receive these extra channels from a satellite and a dish on the roof, not from a duct in the ground.

The low popularity of cable in those areas where it has been laid is the main reason for Videotron's withdrawal. Only 20.8 per cent of homes offered the service have taken it. This is less than half the penetration rate achieved in the United States — the inspiration for Baker's dream.

Britain's comparative indifference, however, reflects, perversely, to Mr Baker's credit, his insistence that the television cable must be buried underground. In America it hangs thickly festooned from telephone poles. Burying cable greatly increases the costs of installing a system and the high cost greatly discouraged British investors.

As a result, years went by before cable was installed on any appreciable scale and the main investors have been giant North American telephone companies. In the meanwhile, satellite television offered by BSkyB (40 per cent owned by News International, the owner of *The Times*) got a headstart.

But Videotron may be pulling out of Britain at just the wrong time. The old dream of the wired nation was based on technical reality: the same capacitive cable that brings in television pictures can also bring in telecommunications — voice, telephone calls and computer data. And suddenly in Britain, unlike America, cable telephone has taken off. By undercutting British Telecom's



BRENDA MADDOX

rates, the cable industry now has more telephone customers (1,216,375) than it has television subscribers (1,159,774).

Other prospects are brightening too. The Office of Fair Trading has decided to investigate the industry's dominance of the pay-TV market. Also, starting this autumn, BT will have to allow cable telephone subscribers "number portability": you will be able to switch to cable telephone and take your BT number with you — until now, you had to switch numbers.

Most important is that cable has now reached a critical mass. One-quarter of homes now have access to cable television, a share that will rise to 40 per cent by the end of the year. A national advertising campaign will shortly be launched, to boost cable's generic advantages, such as telephone, and its local programmes, such as London's Live TV and Channel One.

So the dream was not a pipe-dream. In the long run, cable will catch on and make money for its investors. But will the long wait have been worth it? Obviously Le Groupe Videotron, which is not one of the North American giants, has decided not.

The same question, "Is it worth it?", hangs over last week's mysterious merger of MAI, the group which controls the ITV companies, Meridian and Anglia, with United News and Media, which publishes the *Daily Express*. There is no logic to it, just the same hazy faith in synergy — that some-day information and entertainment, print and screen will all wash as one big tub of electronic data.

But Lord Hollick, head of MAI, seems to be convinced that the short-term gains from cross-promotion of television by newspapers justifies allying his company with the owners of the declining *Express*. MAI owns a chunk of the new Channel 5, the terrestrial channel which starts next January.

Just to grow bigger may be sufficient motive in itself. The trick is to do it without getting too big. The Independent Television Commission's limits on audience and advertising share stand in the way of the instinct to get as big as possible.

Andrew Mitchell on how Coca-Cola is using discovery marketing

Letting the secret out of the can



Cherry Coke wants people to "discover" the drink themselves

Go along to Mayfair's Ideal Club sometime this month and, if you're young enough to enter, you'll find a different world. The place is draped in black and red, there are cherries everywhere. Cherry Productions, which has kindly laid on the evening's entertainment, has also provided hairdresses, make-up artists, Red or Dead fashion clothes, and before-and-after photographs for punters who want to leave their old selves behind.

If everything goes right for Cherry Productions, one month's 1,000 young souls will leave the club with a new brand on their lips. And they'll pass the message on, via youth culture's jungle drums.

Cherry Productions' problem is that it is a front for the world's biggest marketing machine — Coca-Cola. But it has to content itself with tiny, low-profile promotions like this because anything more might frighten away its target market.

Since the brand it is pushing — Cherry Coke — was launched in the UK ten years ago hardly a penny has been spent on advertising it. Yet teenagers are buying it in ever-greater numbers (sales have doubled over the past two years) partly because, its marketers suspect, they have done nothing to market it. Youngsters have discovered the brand for themselves, says Andrew Medd, the marketing manager.

Now that upstart Virgin Cola has introduced curvy new containers that give a strong and cheeky hint of the famous Coca-Cola bottle, Cherry Cola marketers hope their club nights will help solve their dilemma. They are entering the subterranean world of "discovery marketing", where a verbal recommendation has far more influence than a TV commercial; where being different really matters; where the measure of a brand's "in-ness" is, in part, a product of its obscurity.

Cherry Coke is now being relaunched as "different". And it is a relaunch with a difference, of course. No fanfares. No giddy ad campaigns. Even Cherry's new packaging is being kept under wraps. Literally.

Its old bubblegum-pink design was the proudest of its soft-drinks' confidence in its marketing team) is being replaced by black and red street-cred graffiti-style packaging (for which Coca-Cola has invented a

new type face). But the new cans are being covered with a plastic wrap printed with the old design. Only if you look closely do you notice that you can peel it off. "It's all about discovery," says Medd.

Trendy club nights organised by Cherry Productions and wrap-up gimmicks like this will, Coca-Cola hopes, intrigue its young buyers. And to keep them intrigued, Medd's marketing team is now searching for any event, stunt, sponsorship or activity that will attract their attention.

Marketers always differentiate their products — trying to get consumers to notice something special about them — but Cherry Coke is "selling difference itself", he boasts. "We are like teenagers. We are consciously trying to be different for the sake of it. We want to be attributed as

How to sell 200m extra newspapers

Brian MacArthur on the rapidly-rising Sun

A NEW record sale of 4,670,000 (almost outstriking its Sunday stablemate, the *News of the World*) was achieved by *The Sun* on the last Saturday in January. Its booming Saturday sales lifted the paper to an average sale last month of 4,128,000, up 22,000 on a year ago, according to the Audit Bureau of Circulations.

Since its cover price was slashed to 20p in June 1993, *The Sun* has increased sales by more than 660,000 — selling an extra 200 million more papers a year — and has doubled its lead over the *Daily Mirror* to more than 1.5 million a day. *The Sun* now accounts for almost one in three national daily sales, in spite of recent price rises.

At an average of 687,992, up 56,000 on a year ago, *The Times* also set a new sales record. Since the cover price was reduced in 1993, sales are up by 333,000 and still increasing, again in spite of recent increases in price. Its share of the daily broadsheet market has almost doubled to 25 per cent.

The effect of cutting prices (and subsequently increasing them in gentle doses) has boosted sales of tabloids (up 774,000 year-on-year) and broadsheets (54,000).

There is a more dramatic change, however: in three of the past seven months, the daily broadsheets have, for the first time, outsold the heavyweight Sundays. The reason is the success of the dailies' bumper Saturday editions, seen increasingly as serious rivals to the Sundays. More papers are now sold on Saturday than any other day of the week.

Meanwhile an urgent priority for Clive Hollick, the Labour life peer who will soon be chief executive of the merged MAI/United Newspapers group which owns *Express Newspapers*, is to stop declining sales. Three of the five papers with the biggest falls in sales last month were *Express* titles, with the *Sunday Express* down year-on-year by 152,000, the *Daily Star* down by 58,200 and the *Daily Express* down by 31,200.

WINNERS AND LOSERS		
Title	Average sales (000s)	% change on Jan 95
Daily Mail	2,095	+14.0
The Times	1,887	+8.0
The Mail on Sunday	2,134	+6.7
Financial Times	295	+5.7
Daily Mirror	2,560	+4.0
Sunday Express	1,286	-10.8
The Observer	448	-5.0
Daily Star	388	-7.8
News of the World	4,717	-2.8
Daily Express	1,265	-2.4

Source: ABC — January 1996

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Kenneth Branagh in a 17th-century sex shocker

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The growth of unusual venues to get married

SPORT 42-48

Simon Barnes steps back in time with Wigan

TELEVISION AND RADIO
Pages 46,47

THE TIMES

BUSINESS EDITOR Lindsay Cook

WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 14 1996

National Lottery scratchcards down on their luck



SALES of National Lottery scratchcards hit their lowest level last week, amid signs of growing hostility in the crowded UK scratchcard market. Instant sales slipped to £193 million, crowning seven successive weeks of lacklustre performance.

Sales have been falling steadily from a weekly peak of £44.4 million in May 1995, not long after instant sales were launched. Camelot, the National Lottery operator, has introduced several new games in the hope of boosting sales, but without success. It faces additional challenges from rival operators, such as Littlewoods, the pools group. Scratch-n-Win, backed by Lord Mancroft, the anti-drugs peer, and Lucky Lotto, which is advertising heavily to try to boost sales. Interest in the televised National

Lottery draw has boosted on-line ticket sales well above the "usual" spend of about £65 million a week. On-line sales peaked at nearly £128 million in the week of the double roll-over in early January, and were £75.5 million in the week to February 10. Sales of Instant were running at £25 million or more a week until Christmas, but have tailed off sharply since then.

Camelot always expected Instant sales to account for 20 to 30 per cent of total sales, and says that the decline mirrors the pattern overseas. However, current levels are at the low end of expectations, and there are signs that the public has become confused by the wide variety of games on offer.

Camelot currently has ten games on sale, including Noughts & Crosses and

Aces High. Scratch-n-Win has six on sale. Littlewoods runs several games on behalf of specific charities, and claims sales of £1.4 million a week.

Scratch-n-Win will not disclose precise figures, but expects sales to top £100 million "comfortably" this year, if January is anything to go by.

UK Charity Lotteries, the name behind Lucky Lotto, hopes to reap an extra £300,000 a week in sales from its current advertising blitz. Weekly sales are currently running at about £1.3 million.

For every £1 spent on a Camelot scratchcard, 12 per cent goes to the Government. 5 per cent to retailers, 5 per cent to the company and 28 per cent to the five "good causes" that benefit from lottery funds. The company is

supposed to put the remaining 50p into the prize pool, but in fact puts 55p into it for every card sold. It is able to do this because it effectively subsidises the scratchcard prizes from the money it gets from its on-line game.

Peter Davis, Director General of the National Lottery, allows this because the overall amount of money that Camelot puts into the combined pool of its scratchcard and on-line games comes to about 50 per cent.

Charity scratchcard operators have long complained that this is unfair. Unlike Camelot, charity scratchcards are ruled by the Gaming Board, which insists that the charities put only 50p per £1 scratchcard into the prize pool.

BUSINESS TODAY

STOCK MARKET		
FT-SE 100	3747.5	(+21.0)
Yield	3.87%	
FT-SE A All share	1841.55	(+8.38)
Nikkei	20784.23	(+150.55)
Dow Jones	5609.54	(+9.33)
S&P Composite	662.35	(+0.90)

US RATE		
Federal Funds	5 1/4%	(5 1/4%)
Long Bond	99 1/8%	(99 1/8%)
Yield	6.02%	(6.04%)

LONDON MONEY		
3-month Interbank	6 1/4%	(6 1/4%)
Life long gilt	108 1/4	(108 1/4)
Future (Mar)	108 1/4	(108 1/4)

STERLING		
New York	1.5342*	(1.5280)
London	1.5342	(1.5309)
DM	2.2678	(2.2542)
FF	7.8050	(7.7510)
Sfr	1.2620	(1.2585)
Yen	164.05	(163.21)
E Index	84.2	(83.8)

DOLLAR		
London	1.4778*	(1.4782)
FF	5.0630*	(5.0750)
Sfr	1.2095*	(1.2065)
Yen	106.80*	(106.65)
E Index	86.2	(86.0)

Tokyo close Yen 106.57		
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NORTH SEA OIL		
Brent 15-day (Apr)	\$17.10	(\$18.35)

GOLD		
London close	\$401.55	(\$403.45)

* denotes midday trading price

Asil Nadir 'laundered £400,000 stolen funds'

By Jon Ashworth

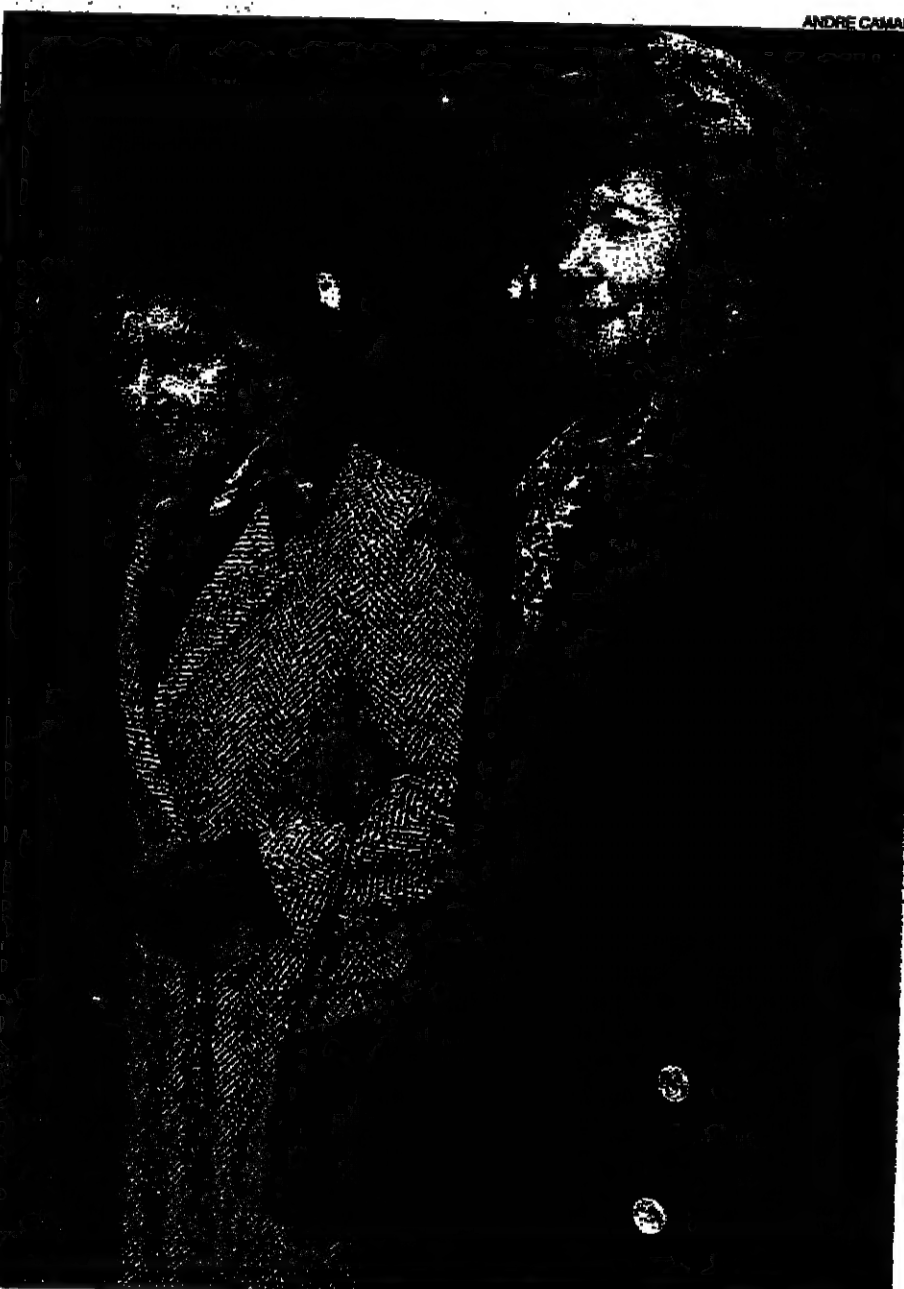
ASIL NADIR, the fugitive businessman, laundered £400,000 in stolen funds through Swiss bank accounts in order to pay personal debts, the Central Criminal Court heard yesterday.

The money was channelled from Polly Peak International (PPI), once one of the UK's top performing companies, and used to pay stockbroking fees and other private expenses.

Details of the alleged transactions emerged at the opening of the trial of Elizabeth Forsyth, former financial adviser to Mr Nadir. Mrs Forsyth, 59, of Great Dunmow, Essex, denies two counts of handling £307,000 and £88,050 in stolen funds in October 1989. She was appearing at Chichester Road, the Central Criminal Court, annex on Chancery Lane.

David Calvert-Smith, opening the prosecution for the Serious Fraud Office, told the jury of seven women and five men that Mr Nadir used Mrs Forsyth to disguise the fact that he was using company funds to pay private debts. In October 1989, the court heard, Mr Nadir needed a large sum of money to pay some private debts. He allegedly stole the money from PPI and used Mrs Forsyth to launder the money so that no trace of its origins remained.

Mrs Forsyth's 88-year-old mother, Margaret McAlpine, joined onlookers in the courtroom. Mr Calvert-Smith told the jury that PPI grew rapidly after Mr Nadir became chairman in 1980. Within seven years, it had interests in America, the Far East, Turkey and northern Cyprus, and, by 1989, was ranked as one of the UK's top 100 companies. One of the northern Cyprus subsid-



Elizabeth Forsyth, right, with Margaret McAlpine, her 88-year-old mother, yesterday

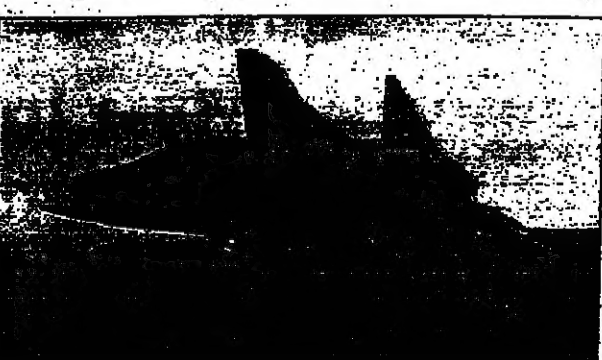
BAe joins US consortium for Harrier replacement

By Ross Tieman and Ian Brodie

BRITISH AEROSPACE and McDonnell Douglas of the United States have unveiled plans for a tail-less aircraft to replace the Harrier jump jet and the F16 Eagle, the world's most successful post-war strike aircraft.

The supersonic jet, steered by its engine, is one of three vertical take-off and landing designs competing for \$10 billion of development funds under a joint US-British programme. British Aerospace, teamed with Northrop Grumman as well as McDonnell, is determined to earn a 10 per cent stake in a programme that could sell 3,000 to 4,000 aircraft worth more than \$80 billion over the next 50 years.

Rival designs are being drawn up by Lockheed Martin, the world's biggest defence contractor, which has bought technology from Yakovlev of Russia, and by Boeing. But BAe hopes its experience in developing the Harrier, produced under licence for the US Marine Corps by McDonnell



Wings and prayers: the BAE consortium's tail-less fighter

Barings investors to proceed with writs

By Robert Miller

INVESTORS who lost more than £100 million in the collapse of Barings will today authorise lawyers to issue writs against former senior executives at the bank, and three leading City houses that participated in the bond issue.

Jonathan Stone, the lawyer heading the Barings Bondholders' action group, said that writs aimed at recovering the original £100 million as well as a further £9 million in lost interest payments, and all the costs involved, should be issued shortly.

The three former executives of Barings, which crashed almost a year ago with debts of £860 million run up by the dealings of Nick Leeson on the Far East money markets, have been named as Peter Baring, the former chairman, Andrew Tuckey, his deputy, and Peter Norris, chief executive officer of investment operations.

Writs are also to be served on City houses that participated in the January 1994 bond issue, including Hoare Govett, part of ABN Amro, the Dutch

banking group, BZW and Cazenove. Barings plc and Baring Brothers, both of which are in administration, will also be the target of writs issued through Ernst & Young, the administrator. This is a technical move aimed at moving the bondholders up the list of creditors, from near the bottom as subordinated loan-note holders.

The move by the private bondholders has the backing of several powerful institutions through the Association of British Insurers, some of whose members - among them Legal & General and Scottish Amicable - also invested in the loan notes.

Mr Stone said that ING, the Dutch banking and insurance combine that bought Barings, might also consider making compensation payments in view of the fact that it made "a serious error of judgment" in paying £90 million in bonuses to bank staff on the back of Leeson's bogus trading.

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Unilever wins fight with taxman

By Our City Staff

UNILEVER, the multinational trading group, yesterday won a £17 million battle with the taxman.

Sir Thomas Bingham, Master of the Rolls, said in a judgment in the Court of Appeal that the Inland Revenue had abused its powers with a company that had a reputation as a "model taxpayer".

He said it had disallowed corporation tax rebate claims by Unilever to take into account trading losses because the company had not complied with a two-year time limit.

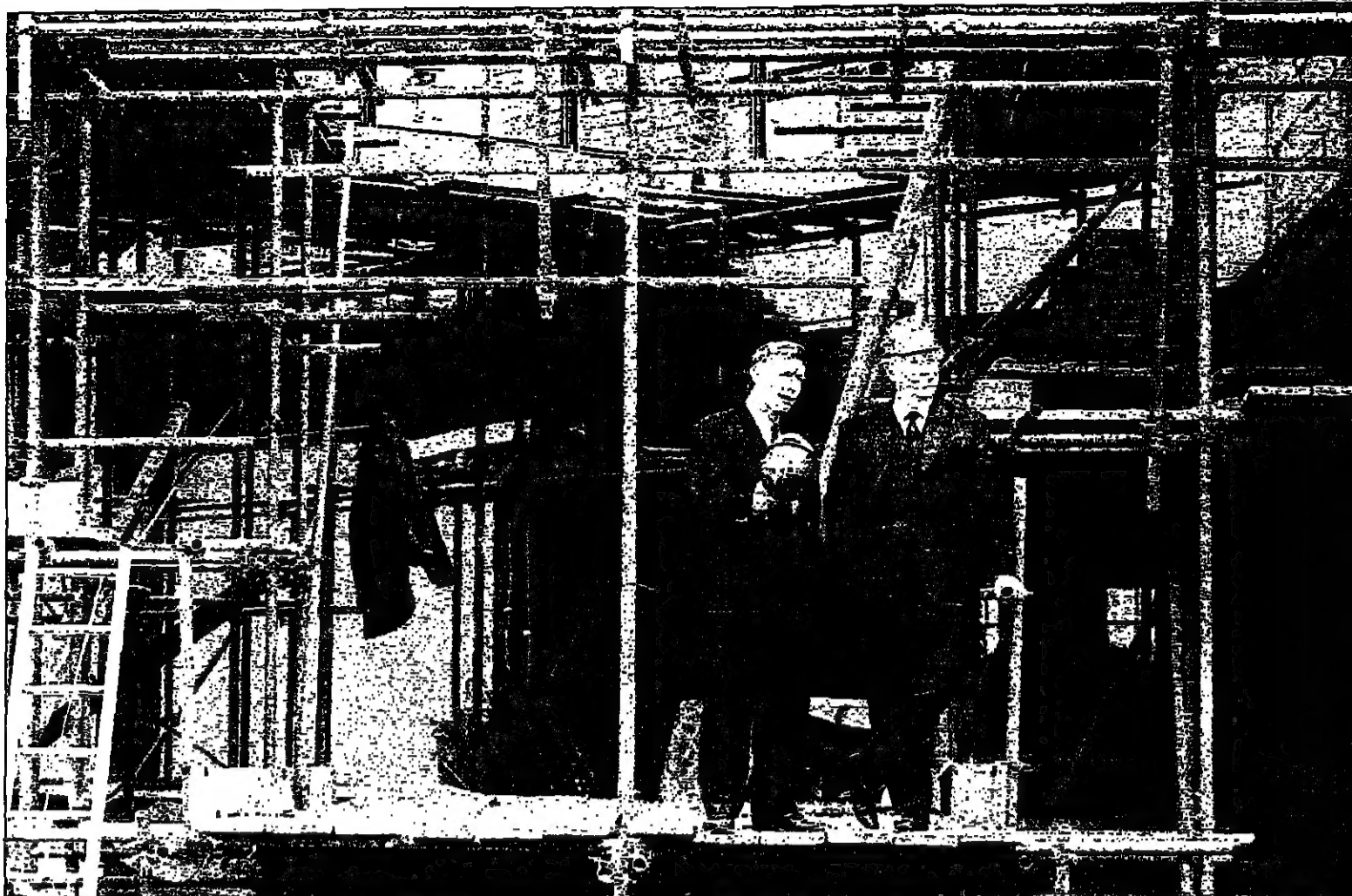
Legislation was amended from March 31, 1991, so that claims must be made within two years unless the Revenue allows longer.

But in an examination of 1,247 Unilever companies for accounting periods since 1969, there were 116 instances of trading losses. Of those, only 40 tax claims were presented after the two-year period's expiry.

The Revenue challenged ten of these, but allowed 30 "without comment or question of objection". Sir Thomas said Unilever and the Revenue had a "consensual procedure" that had worked for many years.

When the Revenue objected to the loss relief and demanded full payment, Unilever applied for judicial review in the High Court where it was ruled that the Revenue could not in fairness, having regard to its past conduct, treat the claim as time-barred.

Dismissing the Revenue's appeal, Sir Thomas said that to reject Unilever's claims in reliance on the time limit, without clear notice, was as unfair as to amount to an abuse of power.



Anthony Glossop, left, chief executive of St Modwen Properties, and Stan Clarke, chairman, increased the total dividend 31 per cent to 2.1p a share after reporting a 6.4 per cent rise in pre-tax profits to £10 million for the year to November 30. Net assets rose 8.2 per cent to 53p a share

Construction orders rise but outlook still gloomy

By Janet Bush, Economics Correspondent

CONSTRUCTION orders reached their highest level for two years in December but the industry still gave a warning that its workload would continue to decline and job losses escalate during the early part of this year.

The Construction Industry Employers Council (CIEC) lambasted the Government for failing to give momentum to the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and so replace cuts in construction capital spending.

The Department of the Environment said that the total

volume of new orders in the fourth quarter was 21 per cent higher than in the third quarter, and 20 per cent higher than in the final three months of 1994.

However, it gave a warning that the jump in orders was the result of a small number of large contracts in the private commercial and industrial sectors. It noted that, overall, orders in 1995 were 4 per cent down on the previous year because of sharp drops in both the public and private housing sectors.

Martin Laing, chairman of

the CIEC, acknowledged that yesterday's figures were encouraging and that they could constitute the first genuine sign that construction orders could be on the start of an upward path. But he still insisted that there is considerable uncertainty.

Mr Laing said that there were two urgent requirements that must be met if the continuing decline in the construction industry was to be reversed: a return to confidence in the housing market and Government action to galvanise the Private Finance

Initiative into generating substantial numbers of new projects quickly.

Mr Laing said the Government had repeatedly expressed the wish to set an example as a "best practice client" of the construction industry. However, it had conspicuously failed to do this in three critical areas — the need for quality instead of the lowest price; the need for single-point responsibility for projects; and the Government's poor track record on prompt payments.

He added: "We are committed to making a success of the PFI but our commitment is not open-ended. We cannot continue to tolerate the prohibitively high tendering costs for PFI projects which we are facing at present."

Mr Laing also complained about low investment, including in construction, claiming that to date the share of annual output going to this end had dropped by a quarter in the 1990s. However, he was more hopeful on prospects for the housing market, saying that tax cuts taking effect in two months' time would help, as long as interest rates are pushed and maintained at the lowest possible level.

Singapore BICC ban contested

By Christine Buckley

ACTION by the Singapore authorities to ban a subsidiary of BICC, the cable and construction operation, from new government contracts in the next five years brought a swift appeal from the company, which yesterday announced cablemaking expansion in Asia-Pacific.

News of the ban, which affects all work with Singapore's Public Utilities Board, with whom BICC has worked for more than ten years, cannot derail BICC's plans to build a cablemaking factory in Indonesia.

A spokesman for BICC said that allegations of corruption which led to Singapore's ban would be contested. Singapore named five companies in relation to the conviction of a key official at the Public Utilities Board, who was recently jailed for 14 years for corruption and criminal conspiracy. The other companies were Siemens of Germany, Italy's Pirelli and Japan's Tomoe Corporation and Marubeni Corporation.

BICC said that it is pumping \$11 million into a \$45 million cablemaking factory in Indonesia. BICC is also establishing a data cable systems business in the Philippines at a cost of \$10 million.

Pennington, page 27

Superscape shares soar on IBM deal

SHARES in Superscape VR surged 75p to 539p after the virtual reality software company unveiled a potentially lucrative worldwide distribution deal — thought to be worth more than \$3 million — with IBM, the US computer group.

IBM will market and sell Superscape's virtual reality software and related services, such as consultancy and training, throughout Europe, the Middle East, Africa and the former USSR. Agreements covering the Asia-Pacific and important North and South American markets are also in the offing. Superscape's market capitalisation has increased from £38.8 million to £45 million.

Atari plans merger

ATARI, the US computer and video games company, is to merge with JTS Corp, a privately owned disk-drive manufacturer, as part of a diversification away from entertainment. Atari has had difficulty maintaining its position in the games industry against Sega and Nintendo, its Japanese rivals. Atari shareholders will own 60 per cent of the merged company. JTS was formed in 1994 by Jugl Tandon, the company's chairman. He will be chairman of the new company.

Sun Alliance slips

SHARES in Sun Alliance fell 6p to 362p yesterday after Chubb Corp, its US partner, announced it was reducing the amount of business the two insurers cede to each other. Annually, Sun Alliance supplies £200 million of business to Chubb and receives £300 million back. Sun Alliance confirmed business was likely to reduce by a third this year, next year, and a further third in 1998. A spokesman for the UK insurer said the partnership had been working since 1982. Chubb holds 5 per cent of Sun Alliance, while Sun holds under 3 per cent of Chubb.

Earle leads action group

FRASER EARLE, a former chief executive of Standard Chartered's China business, will head an action group of shareholders in two Classic Bloodstock companies, the troubled racing investment group that has raised nearly £5 million from 7,000 investors. At an emergency meeting of Classic Bloodstock II last month, it emerged that the company had raised £2.7 million of which £1.4 million was spent on postage and stationery and a further £1 million on promotion and marketing. Only £91,170 was spent on purchasing six horses.

Biotrace chief named

BIOTRACE INTERNATIONAL, the biotech diagnostics company where Brian Levett, chief executive, left abruptly in November, will today name his successor. Jim Keir, until last April managing director of Amersham International's international trading and technologies division, is joining immediately. Biotrace, whose main products detect food contamination and are based on the enzyme that allows fireflies to glow in the dark, floated in November 1993 at a price of 130p. Yesterday the shares closed at 39p.

US pay rising slowly

AMERICAN workers' pay and benefits rose by 2.9 per cent last year, the smallest annual increase since the US Government began tracking such changes in 1982. The US Labor Department said that the rise in its Employment Cost Index was held back by the tiniest advance on record in benefits such as health care and holidays. Many analysts had expected an even smaller employee cost increase last year, of about 2.6 per cent. The previous yearly low for the index was 3 per cent in 1994.

Danka raises £128m

DANKA BUSINESS SYSTEMS, the office equipment supplier whose shares are listed in London, has placed 17 million shares, mostly in the form of American Depositary Shares (ADS), with institutional investors at \$42 per ADS, equivalent to 683p a share. Each ADS represents four ordinary shares. Proceeds of the placing, estimated at £128.4 million, will be used to reduce borrowings arising from the acquisition of Infotech Europe BV. Existing Danka shares fell 3p to 700p yesterday.

Fisons Scientific ahead

FISONS Scientific Instruments saw a strong turnaround with operating profits of £5.7 million in the 12 months to December 31. The company lost £9.8 million in the previous year and £38 million in 1993. The recovery was attributed to a 10 per cent rise in turnover to £286.3 million and costs cuts. Employees were reduced by 9 per cent to 2,796 by the year end. Fisons Scientific Instruments is now owned by Rhone Poulenc Rorer, which is negotiating its sale to Thermo Instruments Systems of the US for £202 million.

Warning from EMH

SHARES in European Motor Holdings fell 18p to 82p yesterday after the company said that annual profits would fall to about £6.5 million before tax from a reported £7.9 million in the previous 12 months. Richard Palmer, chief executive, said that trading in the motor retail division had fallen significantly below budget in the past two months. This reflected adverse weather conditions and a change in product cycles by auto manufacturers. Depressed retail demand had affected initial contributions from new franchises.

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Belgium F	48.27	45.07
Canada C	2.207	2.047
Cyprus Cyp	0.756	0.701
Denmark K	9.34	8.54
Finland Mk	7.036	6.56
France F	6.17	5.78
Germany Dm	2.41	2.30
Greece Dr	352.00	287.00
Hong Kong \$	12.48	11.48
Ireland P	1.08	0.94
Israel S	8.100	4.510
Italy Lira	2512.00	2857.00
Japan Yen	177.40	181.40
Norway Kr	4.658	4.557
Netherlands Gld	2.678	2.448
New Zealand \$	1.64	1.53
Norway Kr	10.44	9.64
Portugal Esc	245.50	227.00
S Africa Rd	1.57	1.70
Spain Ptas	168.50	163.50
Sweden Kr	11.23	10.43
Switzerland F	1.57	1.47
Turkey Lira	ref	50407.0
USA \$	1.507	1.467

Rates for credit concentration bank notes only as supplied by Barclays Bank PLC. Different rates apply to travellers' cheques. Rates are at close of trading yesterday.

Hi-tech campaign starts

By Philip Pangalos

IAN LANG, President of the Board of Trade, yesterday launched a £35 million four-year initiative to help UK businesses to plug into the opportunities offered by new information and communication technologies.

The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) chose Canary Wharf, in the London Docklands, as the venue to launch its Information Society

Initiative (ISI) in spite of last week's IRA bomb outrage.

The ISI, aimed at smaller and medium-sized companies, will focus on demonstrating the problem-solving capabilities of technology. The DTI plans seminars and roadshows to encourage use of electronic networking, video conferencing and other electronic services. A recent survey found that 25 per cent

of firms in America regularly use e-mail, against just 3 per cent in this country, and about 40 per cent of companies in the UK have no computers.

The ISI will offer 50 local support centres, providing hands-on experience, building on the Business Links network. Mr Lang said: "It is enormously important to increase the competitiveness of British industry."

So civilised, the French method of receivership

By Jonathan Prynn, Patricia Tehan and Ben Macintyre

IT IS a very French way to sort out a basket case. Rather than the shattered careers, massive job losses and brutal finality that goes with the Anglo-Saxon system of receivership, the French send in impartial mediators to seek a civilised solution.

The *mandataires ad hoc* system, introduced in 1954 has been tried many times before but never on a company remotely as large as Eurotunnel, nor on a multinational.

Lord Wakeham and Robert Badinter, the two mediators appointed last week, have no fixed term of contract and are not obliged to make a formal report at the end of their deliberations.

They can see who they like, meeting when they like and where they like. As Sir Alastair Morton put it, they can hold their meetings in a bar if they want to — the



Wakeham: no fixed term

emphasis is on informality. The best translation of *mandataires ad hoc* might be a "wise man" or *amicus curiae*, a friend of the court.

Their priority is to find a solution to an employer's problems that will preserve jobs, not to act as the representative of a baying mob of creditors as under the Anglo-Saxon tradition.

French law emphasises, in order of priority, the continua-

tion of the company and the jobs it provides, the preservation of the shareholders' interests, and finally those of creditors.

Their eventual recommendations, if any are produced, are non-binding and can only be implemented with the agreement of the main parties involved.

Although few of the many parties involved in the Eurotunnel crisis objected to the appointments yesterday, there is little optimism that they will find an acceptable compromise solution to a problem that has eluded some of the finest financial brains in London and Paris.

Eurotunnel's banks were last night trying to take a positive view of the development. Although some have expressed concern that Eurotunnel might use the appointment of mediators as a negotiating tool, bringing the threat of liquidation closer, others said it might actually help to resolve the deadlock in talks.

Study backs new job count

By Philip Bassett, Industrial Editor

THE Government should introduce a new survey-based measure of unemployment each month, in addition to the regular count of jobless claimants, according to a new government study.

The Central Statistical Office (CSO) will publish tomorrow a report on jobless figures commissioned by the CSO from David Steel, an Australian statistician. Details were given yesterday to the Com-

mons' Employment Select Committee.

Dr Steel recommends a monthly version of the current Labour Force Survey (LFS), an internationally accepted measure of unemployment. Every three months it collects labour market data from 60,000 households. To save on costs, Dr Steel proposes collecting the full LFS data from only a third of the sample each month. Some ministers are

sceptical, but may be swayed by the prospect of more accurate charting.

The cost of a monthly LFS could rise to about £14 million annually from between £5 million and £6 million at present.

Ministers hope that new claimant count unemployment figures, to be released today, will show a further fall.

Back to work, page 29



BP res
pump

□ Waning popularity of Instants □ Barings investors take threefold aim □ Desperate paradoxes for the French economy

Scratch fails to relieve the itch

□ YOU CAN see them in their down-at-heel thousands at newsagents in dingy shopping malls or convenience stores on run-down housing estates, the walking wounded of the welfare state, queuing for their instant, ill-lusory fix of hope.

For the scratchcard punter, the chances of a big, life-transforming win are only marginally better than of marrying Anthea Turner. The odds on a small win are rather better, but only if you define a win as the National Lottery does, as getting your money back.

Now the signs are that some of the sheep are no longer willing to be shepherded to market. Sales of scratchcards have been sliding for months and are now well below £20 million a week and probably anchored there.

Camelot, the lottery operator, has overreacted with a rush to produce a range of products to support flagging card sales. As a result, the public is baffled by all the new games on offer, and turned off by the decision to limit some prizes while holding the initial stake money at a pound.

There is also the threat of rival schemes, some of which pay money direct to charities rather than routing it all through the cumbersome Lottery mechanism. Scratchcards are like any new and unexpectedly profitable market, whether in gambling or

alcoholic lemonade. More opportunists than the trade can support will always be dragged in until a process of Darwinian selection strips out the non-performers from the survivors.

There is something especially pernicious about Instants scratchcards, though. The product, and its jolly advertising, is carefully aimed at what are politely known as the C2s and Ds, that section of society least able to afford gambling and least intellectually capable of appreciating the awful length of the odds against winning.

But it is the form of this particular fix that is most disturbing. Failure demands another try, and the instant nature of the scratchcard allows one. Millions may lose every week on the on-line lottery, but the delay between placing the bet and learning of the loss limits the amount wagered. Some gamblers may go in too heavily, but for most families it has become a comfortable weekly ritual.

By contrast, most retailers can tell stories of compulsives who spend far more than they can afford on scratchcards, and come

back every week. Camelot is now considering the results of a pilot scheme running since October that has put the on-line lottery and the cards into a selection of pubs. This misbegotten scheme seems to have attracted little public criticism, so an extension looks likely.

The extraordinary success of the lottery, and the strong performance for on-line sales even on weeks without a rollover, suggest that the fall-off in scratch cards will not harm the fortunes of Camelot and its members. But that decline, although it may be too little and too late, is to be welcomed nonetheless.

Tied up in legal bonds

□ IT IS a mere coincidence that sees two books on Nick Leeson appear just as aggrieved bondholders in Barings are launching fresh legal action against the bank, but it is an unhappy coincidence all the same.

Revelations like those in *The Times* on Monday, that some £80 million or more of the bonuses



paid to Barings managers and executives were based entirely on non-existent "profits" booked by the energetic if misguided Leeson, can only fan the flames. The re-emergence of the Leeson visage, with or without reversed baseball hat, on the front pages will do little for the bondholders' blood pressure.

ING, the Dutch purchasers of Barings, must have known all along that the numbers those bonuses were based on were phoney, but they presumably felt payment was a necessary part of the total bill for buying the bank. It does not take a financial genius, or even the Bank of England, to realise there was going to be something dubious about Barings' 1994 accounts.

The bondholders have, ostensibly, three sets of targets. They want to sue the three main executives at Barings, the three City institutions who managed the bond issue, and they will also have a go at the two Barings companies now in administration, to lever themselves up the list of priority creditors.

They are looking for £109 million plus costs. In the above order, the three executives do not have £109 million. ABN Amro, Hoare Govett, BZW and Cazenove do, but so unexpected and shocking was the collapse of Barings that it hardly seems reasonable to expect them to have foreseen it when putting together the prospectus for the issue in January 1994. They can be expected to put up a strong defence. Barings plc and Barings Brothers are bust, so there is no money there either.

The bondholders' true target is ING. The hope must be that the Dutch, wearying of the endless bickering, will come up with a few million of "nuisance money" to add to the hundreds of millions ING has already spent on Barings. The Dutch might,

and put some money the way of the preference shareholders as well. But their legal obligation to find the cash looks doubtful.

What cost the franc fort?

□ QUELLE horreur, quelle confusion. Who would be a Frenchman, trying to make sense of his country's economic predicament? Denis Kessler, head of the French equivalent of our Confederation of British Industry, tied himself in knots yesterday in an attempt at a rational analysis.

Constant announcements of new tax increases destabilise households and companies. Measures to boost economic growth have undermined confidence. He wants state-directed growth financed with debt — but means about the budget deficit. Production is stagnating, unemployment is rising, pay is too high, investment is too low.

Emerging from this *bouillabaisse* of complaints, however, is one certainty. However dire the economy, the franc must not be

allowed to depreciate. Only a rapid move towards a single currency will provide conditions for lasting growth, he says.

Imagine Britain were still in the exchange-rate mechanism. The recession is deepening, unemployment and repossessions are soaring — and the CBI begs the Chancellor, nay, prays for a thumping great rise in interest rates. Only thus do you have a measure of the strange sickness that seems to have overtaken the French psyche.

M Kessler's outpourings could not have been in greater contrast to those from across the border. Hans-Olaf Henkel, his German equivalent, said his members would not support a single currency unless it could be proved to promote stability. Perhaps Herr Henkel can offer M Kessler some free counselling.

Tangled cables

□ BICC is well ahead of the field for this year's Bad Timing award after announcing an £11 million expansion for its Singaporean cables business just as a local subsidiary was being barred from public contracts after bribery allegations. A couple of years ago, BICC had the misfortune of becoming tangled up in the scandal over the Pergau dam, in neighbouring Malaysia. As Lady Bracknell might have put it....

Apple puts dividend payments on ice

FROM RICHARD THOMSON IN NEW YORK

APPLE Computer, the world's second largest desktop computer company, has suspended dividend payments because of mounting losses.

The move underlines the depth of the problems besetting Apple, which has suffered a series of big setbacks over the past few months.

Apple reported a \$69 million loss in its first financial quarter and last week gave a warning that losses in the second quarter would be even bigger as it pays the price of strategic errors that have left it isolated, with a shrinking market share and a devastated workforce.

Gil Amelio, who took over as chairman and chief executive after a boardroom shake-up two weeks ago, is struggling to put together a new strategy to restore public confidence in the company while keeping it independent.

The dividend decision was well received in the stock market. The shares rose 50 cents in early trading to \$28.875.

The company said yesterday that profit margins would remain under pressure and be below the level of previous years because of intense pricing pressures. Apple blamed increased competition, compressed product life cycles and the need to reduce stocks.

Apple has been forced to discount its desktop computers heavily to protect its market share. It has looked hard for a merger partner, but negotiations with Sun Microsystems were aborted.

JACOBI Computer Group, the UK computer technology company that is majority-owned by Italy's Olivetti computer group, and Apple Computer UK are forming a £5 million joint venture company to develop IT solutions for the UK education market.



Sir David Simon, left, BP's chairman, and John Browne, chief executive, after announcing record profits yesterday

BP results set record but pump wars hurt growth

BY CARL MORTIMER

PRICE competition at the petrol pump is keeping a check on profits growth at British Petroleum. Yesterday, the oil company reported its largest annual profit of £2 billion for 1995, compared with £1.48 billion in 1994, but weak refining margins and price wars at the pump caused a sharp fall in profits from downstream activities.

BP's 36 per cent advance in replacement-cost profit comes before a £709 million charge in the fourth quarter for restructuring its worldwide refining operations. Last autumn, BP agreed to sell a refinery in Ohio, and in January the oil company announced the closure or sale of another three refineries, in the

US, France and The Netherlands. The company also gave warning of a softening in the chemicals markets.

Sir David Simon, chairman of BP, admitted the trading outlook for refining was grim, with margins at their lowest for 10 years. "There is still overcapacity and that is almost certain to affect margins," Sir David said. BP intended to remain competitive on petrol prices.

BP is raising the final quarter dividend by 4p to 4.25p, a total of 15.25p, up 45 per cent on 1994. Sir David said the profit rise in 1995 was achieved by a combination of self-help and volume increases, claiming the oil company had achieved \$2 billion

of performance improvements ahead of schedule. "I think we are back at the upper end of the oil premier league," he said. "The companies that can show productivity gains are the real players."

BP has had discussions with British Gas over take-or-pay contracts but does not expect an early resolution of the problem. The oil company supplies BG with 600 million cubic feet a day but John Browne, chief executive, said that the average cost of the BP contracts was 16p per therm, compared with BG's average cost of some 20p.

Profits from oil exploration and production rose to £579 million in the fourth quarter, from £522 million in the same

period of 1994, thanks to lower exploration write-offs and in spite of a static oil price of \$17 per barrel. BP expects the oil price to remain within a \$16-\$18 range but gave a warning of price volatility owing to uncertainty in the supply/demand balance.

The chemicals division suffered a downturn in the fourth quarter owing to destocking by customers, with profits sliding from £225 million to £127 million. Profits for the year were a record £854 million because of stronger margins and lower costs. In the near term, BP expects softer margins but hopes prices will pick up later in the year.

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Profits at BOC fuel worries in City

BY ALASDAIR MURRAY

BOC left the City mildly disappointed yesterday in spite of increased first quarter profits of £101 million.

The chemicals company's share price dropped 18p to 925p with the results registering at the low end of expectations. There was also some concern that a fall in US demand for liquid products in December signalled the start of a downturn in its vital US markets.

But Danny Rosenkrantz, chief executive, said: "The improvement was in line with our expectations and shows pretty strong growth across all our main markets, except in healthcare, which we expected to be flatish."

Overall, turnover rose 11 per cent to £968 million. The gas division turnover rose 9 per cent to £681 million, while profits rose to £94 million. BOC said demand had remained strong in the US throughout the quarter, with profitability on an upward trend, although the pace of increase had slowed. Sales and profits increased in Europe, the Pacific and South Africa.

Profits in Ohmeda, the healthcare division, fell by 10 per cent to £13.5 million on reduced turnover of £116 million, as the company continued to be hit by generic competitors to its forensic anaesthetic, although it had preserved its market share at about 50 per cent.

Suprane, a new anaesthetic, improved its market share to around one third. The vacuum products and distribution services business continued its upward trend with turnover up 38 per cent to £171 million and profits up to £18 million.

Tempus, page 28

Safeway trading fails to impress

BY CHRISTINE BUCKLEY

CHRISTMAS trading figures from Safeway failed to cheer the market yesterday. Shares in Argill, the parent company, were marked down, and some brokers trimmed forecasts, in spite of a like-for-like rise in sales of 8.6 per cent in the 17 weeks to the end of last week.

City concern focused on a dip in gross margin. This margin — which is in the mid 20s — slipped by 0.4 percentage points, the group said, as competitive pricing in the sector bit hard.

A Safeway spokesman also said that the current round of traditional new year price discounting was proving sharper than in recent years.

The group also disclosed that sales early last month had slowed. However, it said that sales were currently more pleasing.

Safeway is rolling out a strategy to stem the erosion of its gross margin, which will

include promotion of its own brands, a greater emphasis on high-ticket non-food items, such as children's clothes, and a greater contribution from technology. The group is planning more use of self-scanning, now on trial in several stores. It says that scanners that enable customers to add up their own baskets and pass through special check-outs speed shopping.

Safeway says that non-food items such as videos and stationery have buoyed the group against fresh food and other perishables, which sell at punishing margins. The chain has also increased sales per square foot by varying its mix. This, it said, had shown room for improvement.

The group is still pursuing its expansion programme and plans to open 17 stores this year and 17 next year.

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Improved lending volumes help lift AIB

BY PATRICIA TEHAN, BANKING CORRESPONDENT

ALLIED IRISH BANKS, Ireland's largest bank, lifted pre-tax profits by 9 per cent, to Ir£373 million, in 1995. Tom Mulcahy, chief executive, said that the increase was achieved in "a highly competitive environment" because of improved lending volumes and improvement in credit quality.

Neil Dean, chief financial officer, said that the bank had had a particularly good year in Northern Ireland, where lending through the branches was 25 per cent up on 1994, and overall lending was 15 per cent higher. Growth had come "not so much from the peace dividend" as from benefits of putting AIB technology into TSB branches bought in 1991.

Mr Dean said resurgence in

Northern Ireland's economy predated the peace process. He said it was too soon to predict effects of Friday's bomb, but added: "We were growing a solid business prior to the ceasefire. We are confident that we can continue that in most of our businesses."

AIB Bank, which includes retail and commercial operations in the Irish Republic, Northern Ireland, Great Britain, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, increased profits by 10 per cent, to Ir£203.9 million. US profits were steady at Ir£109.6 million, up from Ir£109.5 million.

The year's dividend is 17 per cent up, at Ir£2.9p; the final dividend, of Ir£7.7p, up 20 per cent, is payable on May 2.

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STOCK MARKET

MICHAEL CLARK

Wall Street record run gives London another lift

THE London stock market found the prospect of another cut in interest rates and yet another record-breaking run on Wall Street irresistible.

An early mark-up on the back of a 50-point surge in the Dow Jones average overnight enabled the equity market to claw back some of its recent losses. Despite early volatility in New York during resumed trading yesterday, the FT-SE 100 index managed to cling on to most of its gains finishing 21.0 points up at 3,747.6. The total number of shares traded reached 922 million.

Brokers will be anxiously awaiting today's Bank of England inflation report and earnings data for signs of further scope to ease monetary policy.

The City was unimpressed with the latest trading statement from Argyle, the Safeway supermarket chain, despite a 1.4 per cent surge in like-for-like sales. But this failed to mask a further erosion of margins which forced even the company's own broker, Pannure Gordon, to reduce its profit forecast for the current year by £3 million to £400 million. There was also concern expressed about a slow-down in January sales. The shares responded with a fall of 4p to 316p.

Meanwhile, rivals J. Sainsbury retreated 3p to 382p, and Tesco 14p to 250p with UBS, the broker, said to have turned bearish of the sector.

Burmah Castrol continues to build on last week's new found support with the shares adding a further 20p to a new high of £10.04. This stretches its lead during the past week to 79p. Last week Merrill Lynch was singing the company's praise claiming that the break-up value of the group could be as much as £20 a share. Yesterday's gains were triggered by figures from Castrol India, the group's third biggest generator of profits, showing a near 30 per cent increase in lubricant volumes.

Traders reported heavy turnover in takeover favourite Trafalgar House, up 2p to 35p, as a total of 28.6 million shares changed hands reviving talk again of a break-up bid. Hong Kong Land continues to hold 26 per cent of the shares and has pledged to support the group.

Speculative buying was also good for WH Smith with the



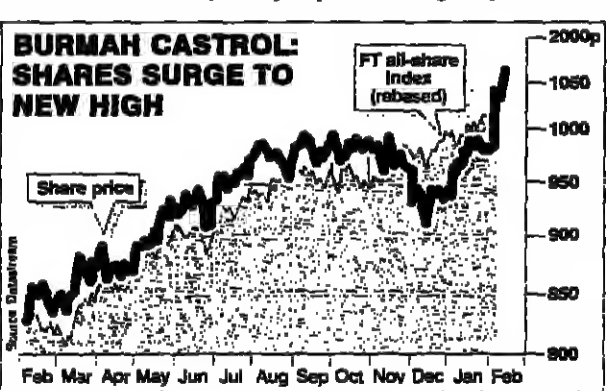
Argyle sales increased but the shares responded with a fall

price adding 7p to 426p on turnover of 1.1 million shares. NatWest Securities, the broker, is taking a long-term view of some of the companies in the old drinks sector, now re-named alcoholic beverages. It is impressed with the medium-term attractions of both Guinness, 25p firmer at 450p, and Grand Metropolitan, 3p better at 448p.

Shares. The placing is expected to raise £128.4 million. Reuters' message to shareholders that it was looking at ways of returning surplus cash to shareholders was good for a jump of 31p to 675p. The group is currently sitting on £800 million of surplus cash and speculation has been mounting in recent weeks that it has been contemplating a

share buy-back operation. It emerged as the international news agency and financial information group unveiled a leap of £39 million in pre-tax profits to £599 million. The main thrust to profits came from Instinet, its computerised share dealing system.

A profits setback in the fourth quarter left BP nursing a fall of 84p to 536p. Net profits during the period were



Feb Mar Apr May Jun Jul Aug Sep Oct Nov Dec Jan Feb

up from £427 million to £501 million, but down on the £532 million achieved in the third quarter. For the year as a whole profits grew from £1.48 billion to £2 billion helped by a firmer oil price.

ABN Amro Hoare Govett, the broker, has switched its recommendation to clients from a "buy" to a "hold" with switching out of the shares benefiting rival Shell, 14p better at 881p, ahead of full year figures tomorrow.

First-quarter figures from BOC Group failed to live up to expectations and the shares slipped 14p to 929p. Industrial gains made all the running while the healthcare side saw profits fall 10 per cent after one-off charges.

A profits warning sent shares of European Motor Holdings, the motor distributor, tumbling 18p to a low of 82p. The group says profits for the year to March, 1996, will fall short of City expectations. The news was followed by a spate of downgradings.

The news from European also sent the shares of other motor distributors into reverse. Evans Halshaw dropped 10p to 315p, Lex Service 5p to 321p, Sanderson Bannam 10p to 223p, Cowie Group 5p to 305p, and Euro-dollar 3p to 94p.

Superscape VR, the virtual reality software group, kept 75p to 539p on the back of its worldwide distribution deal with IBM. No details of the one-year rolling contract were issued but brokers are confident it will provide a major boost to profits.

Windser, the insurance broker, slipped 1p to 20p after some cautious comments to shareholders at the annual meeting.

GILT-EDGED: In the futures pit, the March series of the long gilt touched £109 1/2, before finishing 1/4 better at £109 1/4 as a total of 64,000 contracts were completed. Among conventional issues, benchmark Treasury 8 per cent 2013 rose £7 1/2 to 100 1/4, while at the shorter end Treasury 8 per cent 2000 was three ticks firmer at £104 1/4.

NEW YORK: Shares on Wall Street shrugged off an early weakness to resume their upward march. Technology stocks were weak but were pulled off their lowest levels as investors sought the safety of blue chip issues. At midday the Dow Jones industrial average up 9.39 points at 5,509.54.

MAJOR INDICES

New York (midday):
Dow Jones 5509.54 (+9.39)
S&P Composite 662.25 (+0.90)

Tokyo:
Nikkei Average 20784.23 (+150.59)

Hong Kong:
Hang Seng 11200.19 (+54.40)

Amsterdam:
EEX Index 309.09 (+0.44)

Sydney:
ASX 2289.7 (+26.40)

Frankfurt:
DAX 2634.91 (+5.88)

Singapore:
Straits 2422.67 (+40.08)

Brussels:
General 2807.88 (-12.74)

Paris:
CAC-40 1983.33 (+15.68)

Zurich:
SIX 1000.00 (+10.00)

London:
FT 30 2748.7 (+12.40)

FT 100 3747.6 (+21.00)

FTSE Mid 250 1460.3 (+4.10)

FTSE 250 1861.1 (+4.20)

FTSE Eurozone 100 1557.59 (+7.72)

FT & A-Share 1541.65 (+8.32)

FT & A-Share 1541.65 (+8.32)

FT Fixed Interest 111.05 (+0.25)

FT Govt Secs 94.66 (+0.07)

Bargains 321.02

FTSE 2 Volume 622.38

US\$ (Dollars) 201.60 (+0.10)

US\$ 1.5337 (+0.0027)

German Mark 2.2661 (+0.0119)

Exchange Index 84.14 (+0.46)

Bank of England Official Rate (Hypothetical)

ECU 1.1966

ECU 1.1966

180.7 Dec 0.27% Jan 1987-1990

RPIX 149.4 Dec 0.09% Jan 1987-1990

RECENT ISSUES

Ballynagry Hedges 6

Century Inns (120) 121

MediaCity (60) 65

Nutan Petrol Wms 8

Revelation Pict 105

Self Sealing Sys (54) 53

SkyPharma 8 Wms 84

Viewline 190

Berkeley Gp n/p (435) 85

Oxford MJ n/p (235) 99

Closing Prices Page 30

RISES:

Calm Energy 224p (+27p)

Shield Diag 143p (+15p)

Cliff Resources 145p (+15p)

Real Time 250p (+19p)

Applied Health 118p (+10p)

Carbide Pharms 500p (+30p)

Accom Comp 218p (+13p)

Forward Group 720p (+40p)

Reutec 875p (+31p)

REXAM 374p (+14p)

Dagway 441p (+18p)

Rooney Haulage 618p (+18p)

Granada 725p (+13p)

Shree King 633p (+11p)

Shel 881p (+13p)

Nat West 882p (+10p)

Amersham 882p (+12p)

Volvo 482p (+12p)

Low & High 482p (+12p)

Bodycote 482p (+12p)

Blomcom Int 632p (+12p)

FALLS:

European Motor 82p (-18p)

MAID 174p (-13p)

Evans Halshaw 315p (-10p)

Fitronic Com 410p (-13p)

Border TV 303p (-9p)

SS Cons 672p (-17p)

Yorkshire 320p (-9p)

Garard Nat 443p (-9p)

BOC 229p (-4p)

Telapac 710p (-10p)

BP 536p (-8p)

BANKING ON THE BLAND

ONE of the larger companies in a glamorous sector, Reuters suffers from a dull and worthy image. Fears that its growth rate is slowing triggered "sell" recommendations late last year and since then, flurries of media megadollars have made the company appear more staid. Bland does not mean mediocre, however. The shares have gained about £1 since the autumn and they moved up steadily yesterday after the release of the year-end results.

Reuters sticks to what it does best, providing real-time financial information and news, while developing electronic trading systems such as Instinet. It sinks a small fortune into research and development, makes very few acquisitions and recoils at suggestions that it should diversify. In its defence, it points to Dun & Bradstreet, the

financial services group that includes Nielsen, the ratings agency, as proof that conglomerates get it wrong. D&B is breaking itself up.

However, Reuters is not perfect. It is no longer promising double-digit revenue growth and has been unable to increase product prices significantly in recent years. Reuters also has a habit of hoarding cash: its £850 million cash pile is growing by almost £30 million per month. However, the company intends to address the latter criticism and is considering a share buyback or a special dividend. The former is more likely, given the precedent of a share buyback in 1993.

With so much cash in the bank, the payout is likely to be bigger this time round and shareholders can rest assured that dullness could appear virtuous over the coming months.

BP

YEARS of research would probably never yield a clear answer as to exactly how much of BP's profits recovery is due to its own efforts and how much to the chemicals cycle. BP enjoyed record gains last year on the back of higher chemicals prices, only to see the beginnings of a downturn in September.

Even so, BP's renaissance over three years of volatile oil prices has been staggering. The net result before exceptional items has grown from £336 million to over £2 billion and last year's record chemicals operating profit of £854 million is not enough to account for the increase.

Cost-cutting, particularly in the upstream business, has been a contributor, adding a dollar to BP's margin per barrel from £4.9 since 1992.

More recently the focus

has been downstream and more companies to address its loss-making refining operations spending \$1 billion on capacity reductions. But even such drastic action will not turn refining into a major money-spinner. Overcapacity in Europe is being exacerbated by new refineries in the Far East, once a

highly profitable location. The solution is more cuts in capacity but as BP has shown closure costs are high compared with the marginal cost of running at a loss and state-run enterprises are loath to cut jobs. An outlook of slimmer margins and a weak oil price suggest the next three years will be a greater test for BP.

Argyll

AFTER seasonal excess, thoughts turn to dieting in the new year. In the case of Safeway, which is presently churning out seasonal discounts on its food lines, the slimming experience has been less welcome because it comes in the form of a cut in gross margin.

Less desirable than pounds off the waistline and unattractive for any business, Argyle's margin squeeze in the competitive food retailing sector adds a sobering note to the Christmas trading figures.

Determined to make up the ground in the battle for market share, Argyle has paid a price for increased sales. Gross margins, said to be in the mid-20s, have fallen by half a percentage point.

It is a hard battle for the smaller of this quarrelsome quarter of supermarkets and one which it will wage with a non-food armory while pushing its own brands. At

the same time, it hopes to make cost-savings with the development of self-scanning devices at the check-out.

Safeway's plans for more diversification into high-ticket items such as children's clothes will bring the food retailer up against other aggressive discounters such as Kingfisher and Storehouse. Oil companies are already retreating against the incursion of grocers on their patch and Argyle should not expect to make easy inroads into new markets.

BOC

THIS year, BOC managed to shake off its dull reputation, that these long-term dealers, proving that industrial gases can be a rewarding investment. The share price rose by a third as the company chalked up double digit profits.

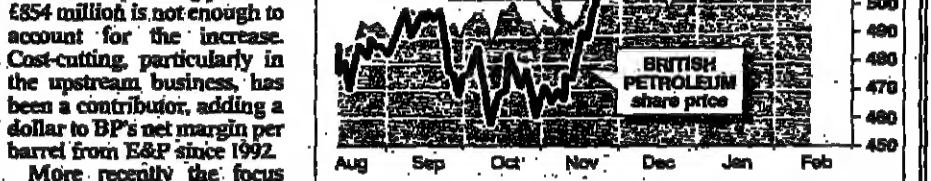
Yesterday's slip in the shares was more of a short-term correction than a downward turn. The quarterly figures were at the low end of

expectations but there are few causes for serious concern. The December slowdown in growth in US liquid chemical sales may be the first indication of a general downturn but BOC's take-or-pay chemicals contracts offer good protection against a collapse in the market. Generic competition in the anaesthetics markets means that margins for BOC's Forane will continue to be squeezed, but the impact is already in the share price.

Many of the US gas contracts will not contribute to profits before 1997. With the high level of transparency that these long-term dealers allow, analysts are predicting profits of around £35 million in 1998, up a third on last year, with plenty of room to raise the dividend yield from its current level of 3.3 per cent. The shares, on a forward rating of about 16, are not cheap, but there is still room to grow.

EDITED BY CARL MORTISHED

BP MORE REFINED PRICES



Aug Sep Oct Nov Dec Jan Feb

COMMODITIES

LONDON COMMODITY EXCHANGE

ICE-100 (London 0.500p)

CRUDE OILS (Barrel FOB)

Brent Physical 18.15 (+0.08)

ICE-100 (London 0.500p)

CRUDE OILS (Barrel FOB)

Brent Physical 18.15 (+0.08)

ICE-100 (London 0.500p)

CRUDE OILS (Barrel FOB)

Brent Physical 18.15 (+0.08)

ICE-100 (London 0.500p)

CRUDE OILS (Barrel FOB)

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ICE-100 (London 0.500p)

CRUDE OILS (Barrel FOB)

Brent Physical 18.15 (+0.08)

ICE-100 (London 0.500p)

CRUDE OILS (Barrel FOB)

Brent Physical 18.15 (+0.08)

LONDON FUTURE MARKETS

FTSE 100

Previous open interest: 4000

FTSE 250

Previous open interest: 711

Three Month Sterling

Previous open interest: 2000

Three Mth Eurodollar

Previous open interest: 1000

Three Mth Euro DM

Previous open interest: 1000

Long Gilt

Previous open interest: 1000

Japanese Govt Bond

Previous open interest: 1000

German Govt Bond

Previous open interest: 1000

Three month ECU

Previous open interest: 1000

Euro Swiss Franc

Previous open interest: 1000

Italian Govt Bond

Previous open interest: 1000

Previous open interest: 1000

Money Rates (%)

Base Rates: Clearing Bank 6% Finance Hse 6%

Discount Bank Loans: Overnight high 6%

Treasury Bills (182 day): 2 mth 6% 3 mth 6% 6 mth 6% 12 mth 6%

Prime Bank Bds (DHS): 6% 6% 6% 6% 6% 6%

Overnight open: 6% close 6%

Local Authority Depos: 6% 6% 6% 6% 6% 6%

Standing CDs: 6% 6% 6% 6% 6% 6%

Dollar CDs: 6% 6% 6% 6% 6% 6%

Bulldog Society CDs: 6% 6% 6% 6% 6% 6%

EUROPEAN MONEY DEPOSITS (%)

Currency 7 day 1 mth 3 mth 6 mth 12 mth

Dollar 5.4 5.4 5.4 5.4 5.4

Deutschmark 5.4 5.4 5.4 5.4 5.4

THE TIMES

CITY DIARY

Tales of a Vienna youth

DADDY, what did you do on your way to the top? Tim Melville-Ross, chairman of the City of London, yesterday gave a talk at the launch of Fulcrum, a new overseas work experience programme for A-level students, sponsored by the Institute of Directors and British Airways. On his way to becoming Director-General of the IoD, Uppingham-educated Melville-Ross worked in a Viennese chocolate factory. "I led a double life, and was completely schizophrenic. I'd rush out at the end of the day smelling of chocolate to meet my rather smart girl friend at the opera," he boasted.

Sir Colin Marshall's childhood memories were rather less exciting. "There was nothing like 'shadowing' people for experience in my day because, of course, I grew up during the war," explained BA's chairman.

But can anybody bear the work experience of China's Foreign Trade Minister, Wu Yi, now visiting Britain? She did extended stints as a bulldozer driver, tried her hand as an explosives operative, and was an oil rigger before becoming Peking's deputy mayor in 1986.

Down — then out

IT IS a sad day for those used to dashing into Debenhams in Oxford Street, skipping down the escalator, and arriving breathless in Midland Bank's Share Shop. The bank, which opened its first Share Shop in Birmingham in 1989 and two years later bought Debenhams Investment Services, which expanded its shop network to 70 in closing the Oxford Street outlet in May. It started life at Debenhams on the third floor. However, in recent years the Share Shop has been moved down to the basement. Midland says the decision was a reflection on Debenhams, it is just that business has dwindled. Would-be customers will be asked to dash across the road to 431 Oxford Street, or trip along to Baker Street, or indeed to any of Midland's other 200 share shops.

"Now that's what I call a Valentine"

All heart

MEANWHILE, Midland Bank is giving a Valentine's Day gift to the villagers of Bruton, Somerset (population 3,500). After a hard-fought campaign to get a banking facility in Bruton after the closure of NatWest's branch last year, Midland has agreed to take over the NatWest premises and open a branch there today.

Months of babes

IF YOU have ever been flummoxed by an idiotic guide to a new personal computer, there is a solution. At yesterday's launch of the Department of Trade and Industry's Information Society Initiative, Ian Taylor, Minister for Science and Technology, recalled being told in a light-hearted vein that instead of PC companies offering a manual with their new product they should send a five-year-old instead.

COLIN CAMPBELL

Shepherd bangs the drum overseas for jobs in UK

Philip Bassett on a government drive to highlight Britain's labour market performance

Gillian Shepherd, the Education and Employment Secretary, flies to Paris tomorrow, armed with today's latest unemployment figures, which ministers hope will show a further fall, to sell what she regards as the success story of the UK labour market — one vital to Britain's overall economic competitiveness.

She will be putting to the French equivalent of the CBI details of the UK's labour market performance, which she published this week. She will also be sending them to Patrick Flynn, the EU's Social Affairs Commissioner, and a range of countries considering making new inward investments in Britain.

To all of them, her message will be the same. "Britain — all of Britain — is getting back to work. We have growing numbers of successful companies, and rising numbers of people in work." However, she says, that at 2.24 million, officials think that it could fall today by 10,000-15,000 below that — unemployment remains "too high".

Her move comes as Brussels is making it clear that it will seek from the UK the abandonment of its opt-out from the Maastricht treaty's social chapter during the process of the intergovernmental conference that starts this summer. But the Government is determined not to let the opt-out go, and the new campaign on Britain's comparative jobs performance is part of its case for retaining it — a case likely to be rehearsed at the EU's first social policy forum in Brussels next month and at the forthcoming G7 jobs conference in London.

Labour is scathing about the Government's claims, the key elements of which are laid out in the accompanying table. Using OECD figures, Michael Mescher, Labour's employment spokesman, says that far from Britain outperforming its principal competitor countries on jobs, looking at the period from 1979 when the Conservatives came to power, the UK heads the relatively small list of wealthy countries where jobs have fallen, with the 0.1 per cent decline in civilian employment contrasting sharply with the 36 per cent rise in jobs in The Netherlands, or the 31 per cent increase in Germany.

Mrs Shepherd may soon have even more figures to add to those released this week on jobs. Tomorrow, the Central Statistical Office (CSO) will start consulting on a proposal to add a monthly survey-based measure of unemployment to the regular count of the number of people out of work and claiming benefit. Details of its report were given yesterday to the all-party Commons Employment Select Committee with clear recommendations for a new unemployment count. The Government's claims on the UK's jobs performance are supported by a study on jobs across Europe from the Institute of Directors. The IoD suggests that in the 20 years to 1994, no net



Gillian Shepherd's message is that Britain is getting back to work

private-sector jobs were created in Europe — while the deregulated US saw a growth of as many as 30 million such jobs over the same period.

Others are less fully persuaded. In a new report on employment across Europe, Income Data Services says that while the jobless rate in Britain has declined, "UK performance on employment creation is less convincing", with the creation of low-paid, part-time and precarious jobs, together

with increased job security, depressing consumer demand and leading to lower economic performance.

Mrs Shepherd sees her departments move both as being coached in the framework of competitiveness promoted by Michael Heseltine, the Deputy Prime Minister, and as an important step in the re-engineering of government being acted by merging the employment and education departments. Formally, the new department's business-style mission state-

ment is within that framework: its primary aim is to "support economic growth and improve the nation's competitiveness and quality of life by raising standards of educational achievement and skill and by promoting an efficient and flexible labour market".

Officially, the line from the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) is that both "Es" have equal weight. But with unemployment still falling and education a vital issue, the political advantage to be gained from a concentration on educational issues is clear. "Clearly, in terms of day-to-day detail, it may have this emphasis," Mrs Shepherd told *The Times* when questioned about the apparent stress on education. "But it does not remove in any way from my contention that education and training and higher education are important because of their contribution to the improved competitiveness of the economy. I am absolutely convinced of that."

Officials from Mrs Heseltine's competitiveness unit are trading carefully in the dangerous waters of international educational comparisons, in line with Mrs Shepherd's job comparisons. Such boldness in politically sensitive areas has proved the undoing of some of her predecessors at both Education and Employment. But Mrs Shepherd is highly thought of by Downing Street, and is seen by some as a potential successor if necessary to John Major.

She acknowledges now that the scrapping of the Employment Department last year and its merger with Education were badly handled. What had been a long-cherished aim of some reformers, she said, on the day when e-mail went astray, and staff first heard of the change on the lunchtime news.

Mrs Shepherd rapidly set about reforming the structures of the departments, adopting a business-style organisation that has seen the creation of eight directorates, each led by a director-general, the departure of one of the two "joint" permanent secretaries, and the emergence of Michael Richard as the sole permanent secretary. He says that there were two distinct cultures, two sets of aims, no structure and untrained employees. But he charts the structural reform, the competition between officials for jobs, the sharing of values, and the delayering of senior staff, with numbers down from 145 to 95, as clear evidence of progress. He says: "Despite some scepticism, the response has been more positive than I expected."

Mrs Shepherd agrees, even though she occasionally talks of the "two sides" of the department. She is convinced, too, that the merger will be permanent, whatever the outcome of the next election. She is critical of what she calls the "inward-looking" nature of some of the educational establishment — "they don't see themselves as part of the country's economic effort" — and believes the re-engineering of the departments will reinforce to them too the competitive importance of both education and employment.

She fervently believes in the idea of the merger, that it is working, and that it is vital for Britain's economy. "It has just transformed everything," she says. And her trip to Paris to bang the drum for jobs in Britain shows how far the idea of competitiveness is now running in areas previously denied to it.

	UK	Germany	France	Italy	Spain
% Unemployment	8.5	8.5	11.6	12.6	22.2
% Employment	88	88	89	81	45
% Investment	30*	9	18	9	7
Non-wage labour costs	18**	32	41	44	34

* Proportion of European Union Total (Other countries = 27)
** Data code A: 10 employees for every £100 in wages
Source: DfEE

ICA's next move should be to elect its presidents

From Mr Jeff Wooller

Sir, It is wonderful news that the proposed merger between the English ICA and CIMA has been shelved.

However, we are concerned when Pennington (February 13) states that: "If the English ICA is to grow, it should do so by competing openly with its rivals."

We are not concerned with growth for the sake of growth. If we wanted that we would not have opposed the merger. What we wish to protect is the quality of our qualification, which we felt was being diluted by the proposed merger.

Promote saving through realistic rates

From P. E. Wood

Sir, Dare I suggest that Messrs Clarke and George have got it badly wrong apropos their attempts to reverse the decline in the economy?

I refer particularly to recent adjustments to the base rate.

If it is to be understood that, because of uncertainty, people are saving rather than spending, then, by lowering the base rate and giving financial institutions the incentive to reduce savings rates by even greater percentages to returns below the rate of inflation, it is hardly surprising that, with actual losses on their capital, savers are not in the mood to spend.

Conversely, by increasing rates, these people, who by definition have funds, may be induced to relax a little, while that hitherto favoured species of borrowers, again by definition, are unlikely to change their habits. What is needed is the

promotion of savings through realistic rates, which is a sound basis, and not through the fear of losing one's job, which is not.

The distortion of the money-lending market at the expense of savers is clearly not working and, furthermore, are we certain that, in general, cheap loans to industry are going where they are really needed?

P. E. WOOD, 6 Normanton Street, Brighton, East Sussex.

Risk and reward

From Mr N. D. Anderson

Sir, Mr James Parker seems to consider the high salaries of the senior partners of KPMG justified as a reward for risks taken (Letter, February 9). As the audit function of KPMG is incorporated, I assume the accounts in 1997 will show a marked reduction in the salaries to reflect absence of risk.

On the day that nurses are awarded 2 per cent, Mr Parker's letter seems ill-considered and ill-timed. Yours faithfully, NORMAN D. ANDERSON, 19 Catterstone Drive, Dundee.

British Gas's suppliers can win both ways

From Mr Roy Albiston

Sir, Suppliers with take-or-pay contracts with British Gas seem singularly well placed. ("Customers flock to switch gas supplier," February 10).

Presumably they can be paid twice for the same gas — first for what they have not supplied to BG because hav-

ing undersold BG, they have destroyed its market, and then again for the same gas supplied directly to the customer. Poor old BG.

Yours faithfully, ROY ALBISTON, Courtlands, Mayfield Lane, Wadhurst, East Sussex.

When faith is not enough

From M. J. Stanley

Sir, If "patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel", it seems caveat emptor is often the last refuge of the insurance industry.

All who purchased a pension scheme (The responsibility for mis-selling and compensation, Business Letters, K. D. Boyd, February 7) thought they were protecting their future, not gambling their savings. In which case *uberrimae fidei* (utmost faith) seems more appropriate than caveat emptor.

Traditionally, the insurance industry has built its business on good faith, hence most general insurance is covered by *uberrimae fidei* contracts. It is high time that the legal position of welfare insurance is clarified if it is to become the successor to the Welfare State.

M. J. STANLEY, 4 The Haven, Locks Heath, Southampton.

A case misdirected along Latin lines

From Mr Ralph Instone

Sir, In arguing that losses on mis-sold policies should be borne by the consumer, Mr K D Boyd (The responsibility for mis-selling and compensation, Business Letters, February 7) reaches the wrong conclusion by a misuse of Latin. The doctrine caveat emptor does not apply to contracts of insurance: *uberrimae fidei* (utmost good faith) does. *Caveat emptor*.

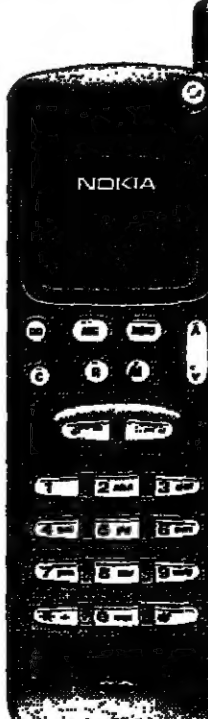
Yours faithfully, RALPH INSTONE, 18 Faircross, Roehampton Lane, Putney SW15.

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& Upjohn**

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If you want a full and varied role within a young, dynamic and progressive company look no further. You will utilise your excellent Sec/admin skills to assist both the Chairman and MD along with ensuring the smooth running of the office. Age 25-40.

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You must have:

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It's an approach that will give you the confidence to deal with anything that comes your way. You'll have the MD's full support right behind you, but you'll need the resilience to enjoy being thrown into any situation and the versatility to always hit the ground running.

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You will, of course, need an excellent record of experience as a PA and should be able to demonstrate good typing and word processing skills, the ability to establish and develop office systems, the organisational initiative to prioritise your own workload and the professionalism to see with tact and diplomacy. Ideally, you will also have some supervisory experience.

Our offices are conveniently located adjacent to Paddington station and we offer a range of benefits including a smoke-free working environment and the option of job sharing. Ref: RS-37.

For an application form and full job description, please contact us at South Thames Regional Office, 40 Southwark Terrace, London SE1 1UL. Tel: 0171-725 2656 (24-hour telephone). Closing date: 28 February 1996.

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South Thames
Regional Health Authority

PRO ACTIVE TEMPORARY SECRETARIES

Are you an outgoing experienced secretary or DTP operator with knowledge of Applianx, Wordperfect or Microsoft Word and enjoy a challenge?

If you are then we need you!!!

We have a number of temporary bookings, both long and short term, just waiting to be filled. If you are looking for an assignment that suits your skills and experience and want to choose the environment in which you work, please call Sarah Martin on 0171 437 9411.

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TYPICAL WE AREN'T!

We have an opportunity not to be missed for a professional, go-ahead PA working for the MD & CFO of Thomson Financial Services - Europe. TFS provides financial information to the global markets and is part of a highly successful \$6-billion international corporation.

This senior role requires a confident, organised, detail conscious assistant who is able to co-ordinate a number of projects whilst managing the day-to-day support for 2 busy executives. Using your initiative you will always be "one-step-ahead", working outside the boundaries of rigid hierarchies and across continents. You will need previous experience of working at a senior level preferably within the finance industry plus a "can do" approach. A high degree of self-motivation and credibility at all levels is essential.

Excellent secretarial skills (typing/shorthand 80/100wpm) and PC literacy are also vital. If you have the drive, energy and commitment to be the best, this is the right move for you.

We offer an attractive salary and benefits package, plus the opportunity to join a fast moving and truly entrepreneurial business. To apply please send a copy of your CV with covering letter detailing why you are the right candidate for this post and your current salary to: Alex Kenney, Human Resources, Thomson Financial Services, Aldgate House, 33 Aldgate High Street, EC3N 1DL. Closing date: 21/2/96.

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Fine Arts Assistant
To £14,000

Applicants should be educated to advanced degree level in Arts and need to demonstrate the ability to work in harmony with our previous customers, with an extensive knowledge of Chinese and Japanese painting and calligraphy. Eco-period loquer and netuke. Fluency in Japanese, some previous experience in the world of fine arts and the ability to read classical Chinese essential. Please write, enclosing CV and current salary, to S.I. Moss Ltd, 51 Brook Street, London W1Y 1AU.

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sought by expanding firm of solicitors in Sussex. We have opportunities in various offices including:

commercial, conveyancing and litigation work. Legal experience not essential. Familiarity with WordPerfect (DOS/Windows) preferred. Please send CV to Geoffrey Ditz, Rother Zedler, 5 Broadhurst Gardens, London NW6 5XK.

MULTILINGUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Shirley Burgess

INTERNATIONAL Bilingual Secretaries

PARIS
Degree level French? Sec skills (WP 50 wpm)? French & English? Ready for the move? 130-200K? Tel: 0171 441 63 37 Fax: 0171 441 63 39 London: 0171-584 6446

ABROAD

FRANCE: Bilingual French PA/Sec for high profile role with top level in Paris. £20K + Bens.

FRANCE: Bilingual PA/Office manager for renowned property Co. Ability to take on top level & support office life. £20K + Bens. Tel: 0171 287 0424 Fax: 0171 437 4141.

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£24,000. Age 30+ with fluent FRENCH and German, WAW. C. London. Tel: 0171 486 7921.

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Bilingual French: Sec opportunity in London in Finance, Insurance, 50wpm/WPM. £18K-20K. Tel: 0171 287 0424 Fax: 0171 437 4141.

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LANGUAGE TEMPS!

Did the postman forget you this morning? He won't make the same mistake next week!

If you have a good range of spoken and a second European language, a minimum of 50wpm typing and are a professional secretary we'll do our best to make sure you receive a first class pay bill heading the CRONE CORKILL name on your doorstep next Wednesday!

Please call Mithra or Gabriela on 0171-434 4512.

Crone Corkill
Multilingual Recruitment

EXCITING OPPORTUNITY IN FRANKFURT

GERMAN SPEAKING PA/SECRETARY £35,000+

Excellent chance to work in the Frankfurt office of this prestigious U.S. law firm. This is an exciting position with lots of potential. Please contact: Ryder Reid Associates, 150 Minories, London EC3N 1LS. Tel: 0171 264 2166 Fax: 0171 264 2140 (U.S. Law Firm Recruitment Specialists)

FRENCH IN INVESTMENT BANKING £19,000 + EXCEL BENS

American bank in city seeks dynamic PA/Administrator to work for Senior Executives as well as ensure smooth running of dept. This is a varied role for self-starter who enjoys variety, using initiative and team work. Please contact: Ryder Reid Associates, 150 Minories, London EC3N 1LS. Tel: 0171 264 2166 Fax: 0171 264 2140.

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4 month contract, post perm. PA/Sec for Director of a leading international company. Excellent salary and benefits. Please contact: Ryder Reid Associates, 150 Minories, London EC3N 1LS. Tel: 0171 264 2166 Fax: 0171 264 2140.

TEMPS up to £10/hr

We have ongoing bookings for experienced and professional Secretaries with excellent skills (WP, Shorthand, etc.). Please contact: Ryder Reid Associates, 150 Minories, London EC3N 1LS. Tel: 0171 264 2166 Fax: 0171 264 2140.

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PARTNER'S SECRETARY
for 2 ptnr int low firm in W1. Age 25-35, WAW 5.1 and 6.1. Legal exp req. £18,500 neg. No agencies. Tel: 637 3071, or fax CV on 637 5516.

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SWEDISH Sec £10,000 An experienced, energetic and versatile temp. Sec for a leading international company. Excellent salary and benefits. Please contact: Ryder Reid Associates, 150 Minories, London EC3N 1LS. Tel: 0171 264 2166 Fax: 0171 264 2140.

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LEGAL SECRETARIES
£21,000 + ++ PACKAGES

We have a secret private law firm, seeking experienced legal secretaries to fill various roles. Minimum requirements are three years legal experience and Windows. WordPerfect 5.1. Current opportunities include: Company Law - W1 - Equity Partner - £21,000 + PRP. Property PA - W1/SW7 - £20,000 + PRP. Litigation - Head of Department - £20,800 + PRP. If you would like any further information on these, or any other current vacancies, please call DIT 2 MAY. CHRISTINE COATES in the strictest confidence on 0171 405 2339 LWP Rec Cons.

RECEPTION SELECTION

URGENT 5 x LEGAL SECS
£19K + perks

First City Law firm, Dynamic Co. rec. legal secs to gain exposure to the varying work demands from their clients. Don't miss out on this opp. to work for this Co. You'll need: 60wpm Audio, adv. Windows, 5 GCSE (C+) Some legal exp. Call Alison on 0171 236 6832. Adv. Alfred Marks (Rec Cons)

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CHARITY Administrator for a leading international company. Excellent salary and benefits. Please contact: Ryder Reid Associates, 150 Minories, London EC3N 1LS. Tel: 0171 264 2166 Fax: 0171 264 2140.

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OFFICE MANAGER for a leading international company. Excellent salary and benefits. Please contact: Ryder Reid Associates, 150 Minories, London EC3N 1LS. Tel: 0171 264 2166 Fax: 0171 264 2140.

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VAUGHAN Assistant for a leading international company. Excellent salary and benefits. Please contact: Ryder Reid Associates, 150 Minories, London EC3N 1LS. Tel: 0171 264 2166 Fax: 0171 264 2140.

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RECEIVED APPOINTMENTS in MAYFAIR. Highly motivated, energetic and professional. Please contact: Ryder Reid Associates, 150 Minories, London EC3N 1LS. Tel: 0171 264 2166 Fax: 0171 264 2140.

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DENTAL PRACTICE looking for an enthusiastic and highly motivated receptionist. Please contact: Ryder Reid Associates, 150 Minories, London EC3N 1LS. Tel: 0171 264 2166 Fax: 0171 264 2140.

PART-TIME VACANCIES

CHARITY FUNDRAISERS needed for worthwhile and rewarding work in friendly Fulham offices. Courteous telephone manner and confident personality essential. Commission only. Please phone 0171-381 1597.

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PT SECRETARY for a leading international company. Excellent salary and benefits. Please contact: Ryder Reid Associates, 150 Minories, London EC3N 1LS. Tel: 0171 264 2166 Fax: 0171 264 2140.

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RECEPTIONIST for a leading international company. Excellent salary and benefits. Please contact: Ryder Reid Associates, 150 Minories, London EC3N 1LS. Tel: 0171 264 2166 Fax: 0171 264 2140.

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A quiet spot to tie the knot

Kim Fletcher wanted to capture that country atmosphere for her wedding and chose Sandhole Farm in Cheshire

- Sandholme Farm, Hulme Walfield, Conington, Cheshire (0260 224419).
- Trivogue, Crackington Haven, Bude, Cornwall (01840 230418).
- Lillingston Associates (0171-736 1377).
- Dream Weddings, published by Slater, £5.99.

RACHEL KELLY



1. The first step is to identify the problem or question that needs to be answered. This involves understanding the context and the specific requirements of the task.

Tomorrow's office today

The office of the future is here today. It uses the latest communications technology and provides flexible workspace to accommodate the needs of international business.

This is the way in which Regus has interpreted the concept of the "virtual office" and the "office of the future". Regus is the leading operator of business centres worldwide, and with its partners in the US and Australasia has more than 120 centres containing some 7,000 individual offices.

The business is fast expanding. When Regus was established in Europe in 1989, it consisted of one centre overlooking Trafalgar Square. Now it has 15 centres in the UK, and in 1995 opened 15 centres in Europe. In 1996 40 openings are planned, including 30 within the UK.

Regus has also expanded into new markets including Johannesburg and Sao Paulo, while centres have been opened in Helsinki, Gothenburg, Zurich, Cologne and Hanover.

Mark Dixon, Regus's managing director, explains that this rapid expansion is due to demand from occupiers. "Companies are increasingly using Regus centres to cope with needs including team rooms for special projects, and permanent but flexible branch offices to serve the local mar-

Christopher Warman on the rapid expansion of Regus

Our typical client needs well-located offices on flexible terms."

He argues that companies need to change the way in which they operate in increasingly competitive markets. They need to reduce fixed overheads, including property and staff, to be near their clients for sales and services; to cut down on time-consuming and costly business travel; and to take into account the desire by employees to enjoy working both in the office and at home.

Companies are already making more efficient use of office space through techniques such as "hot desking", and are looking for property that does not tie them into long-term lease commitments. Regus can let an office by the hour, and provides offices on one, three and 12-month arrangements. In addition it offers a "just-in-time" service allowing clients to use offices when and where they need.

Inside the office, the com-

puter and telephone allows companies to use individuals in remote locations, cutting costs. For example, Disney's film production company, Buena Vista Home Entertainment GmbH, recently took offices in Hamburg and Düsseldorf for the launch of The Lion King on video in Germany.

BP Nutrition has been renting space for ten months in the Brussels centre after consolidation of three of its offices, while for a shorter period Warner Bros recently used the Trafalgar Square centre to hold video-conferenced interviews between the singer, Seal, and journalists throughout Asia.

In Manchester, the Giants basketball team, preparing for the season, has regular meetings with its American-based owners. Using the Regus pay-as-you-view video-conferencing facilities at the World Trade Centre, Salford Quays, the team has face-to-face discussions with coaches and directors in Indiana.

Mr Dixon says that a typical centre comprises 15,000 sq ft, split into offices, and costs £500,000 to £1 million to set up. They are fully furnished, and include telecom facilities, reception areas with laser facsimiles, reproduction and desk top publishing, and meeting rooms with audiovisual equipment.



Manchester Giants outside the World Trade Centre

Mr Dixon says that Regus is now planning to expand national networks, beginning with the UK, Germany and the Benelux countries, and in the next five years aims to open 150 centres. These will include South Africa, Middle Eastern and Asian business centres of more than 100,000

population. Another priority is eastern Europe, where the Budapest office is already successful. "We are looking to the EU to help business, encouraging cross-border banking, and most importantly, harmonising VAT. That is what businessmen want."

Prize Boots

The Boots Company, based in Nottingham, has won the top European prize, the Europa Nostra Medal, for conservation and restoration, for the Sir Owen Williams D10 building that is the headquarters of Boots Contract Manufacturing.

The Boots building is the only medal winner among 40 UK entries, and out of 160 projects across Europe, only seven medals have been awarded. It is the largest Grade I listed industrial building in Britain, and Boots spent four years and some £20 million restoring the factory, which was designed by Sir Owen Williams in the 1930s.

Europa Nostra described it as "one of the most important British buildings of the Modern Movement". State-of-the-art quality control laboratories and office space are enclosed within the listed building.

Abbott Estates Ltd, the developer of Davenport International Railfreight Terminal, has announced a

MARKET MOVES



Award-winning: the restored building contains laboratories

£75-million funding agreement with Hermes Property Asset Management, adviser to the British Telecom and Post Office Pension Funds. Hermes will finance construction of part of the 4 million sq ft island port and distribution and manufacturing complex, and has agreed to acquire completed units as investments.

The developer, a subsidiary of Severn Trent Property, is expected to start construction of the 350-acre scheme, by Junction 18 of the M1, within three months. The railport element will become operational in 1997.

Arrowcroft has been given approval for its

proposed £50-million redevelopment of the Cumberland Town Centre. The signing of the development agreement follows the granting of planning permission by Cumberland Development Corporation for 300,000 sq ft of shopping, including four anchor stores and 50 shops.

The project will link into the existing shopping facilities and will almost double the shopping provision within Cumberland to around 675,000 sq ft. As part of the revitalisation of the town centre, extensive alterations are already underway to the existing road system. Joint letting agents are Donaldsons and Healey & Baker.

PROPERTY

COMMERCIAL PROPERTY

SOUTH OF THE THAMES

CLAPHAM Small but busy 1/2 bed flat, own garden, 19th reception. £110,000 ono. 0171 924 1575

SW11

Nr Clapham Junction, 2 bed flat, own garden, 19th reception. £110,000 ono. 0171 924 1575

BELGRAVIA

Knightsbridge CT, SW1. Newly redecorated 2 bed flat with small balcony. £275,000. Home & Son 0171 499 9244

CHELSEA

SEAPOINT by the Chelsea Lido. 2 bed flat, 2nd floor, 19th reception. £175,000. Home & Son 0171 499 9244

CITY OF LONDON

CLEVERLY. Last year's highest 1 bed flat in 2/5 blocks with own garden. £280,000. Home & Son 0171 499 9244

BARBICAN

The Barbican is peaceful, prestigious and right in the heart of the City of London.

There are currently a few flats available for sale with one bedroom from approximately £95,000 and three-four bedrooms from approximately £185,000.

For an appointment to view call the Barbican Estate Team on 0171-628-4372 (24 hours).

CHELSEA

CHELSEA 4 mins. charming 4 bed house with 2 bathrooms. £235,000. Home & Son 0171 499 9244

CRANLEY MEWS

SW7. Luxury interior designed 2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, own house. £395,000. 0171 373 8146 (H) 0171 334 3141 (W)

HOLMANS

COLLINGHAM Gdns. Spacious modern 4 bed & bath. 19th reception. £275,000. 0171 373 8146 (H) 0171 334 3141 (W)

ROLAND Gdns

Large 4 bed flat with private garden. 2 beds, 2 baths, 19th reception. £175,000. 0171 373 8146 (H) 0171 334 3141 (W)

BURNLEY ST

Reduced for immediate sale. 4 beds, 2 baths, 19th reception. £175,000. 0171 373 8146 (H) 0171 334 3141 (W)

RENTAL INVESTMENT

Spacious 4 bed flat in the heart of the City. 4 beds, 2 baths, 19th reception. £175,000. 0171 373 8146 (H) 0171 334 3141 (W)

DOCKLANDS

OUR PLACE. Vibrant E1. One bedroom, 2 bathrooms, 19th reception. £175,000. 0171 373 8146 (H) 0171 334 3141 (W)

NEW CHANCE WAREHOUSE

2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, 19th reception. £175,000. 0171 373 8146 (H) 0171 334 3141 (W)

HIGHGATE

WEST WOODS. 19th floor, 1 bed flat, 19th reception. £175,000. 0171 373 8146 (H) 0171 334 3141 (W)

KENSINGTON

ARUNDEL Gdns. W11. 4 bed house with 2 bathrooms. £235,000. 0171 373 8146 (H) 0171 334 3141 (W)

NOTTING HILL

Spacious 3 bed house with 2 bathrooms. £235,000. 0171 373 8146 (H) 0171 334 3141 (W)

MAYFAIR

MAYFAIR. Spacious 3 bed house with 2 bathrooms. £235,000. 0171 373 8146 (H) 0171 334 3141 (W)

UPPER BROOK ST.

W1. 3 bed house with 2 bathrooms. £235,000. 0171 373 8146 (H) 0171 334 3141 (W)

RICHMOND & KINGSTON

SW14. Detached double fronted 3 bedroom and 2 bathroom house. £189,950. 0181 876-5499 (T)

RICHMOND & KINGSTON

NEW Gdns to The Gardens. 4 bed house with 2 bathrooms. £235,000. 0171 373 8146 (H) 0171 334 3141 (W)

WEST END

BLOOMSBURY. W.C1. 2 bed flat, 19th reception. £175,000. 0171 373 8146 (H) 0171 334 3141 (W)

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ALL TENANTS. We have a wide range of properties from £200. 0171 373 8146 (H) 0171 334 3141 (W)

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Central London properties for sale. 0171 373 8146 (H) 0171 334 3141 (W)

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HERITAGE

A flood of good ideas to bring life back to the Thames — but all depends on John Gummer



MUSIC 1

Rachmaninov's music tests the conducting craft of the young Russian Mikhail Pletnev

THE TIMES ARTS



MUSIC 2

... while at the Barbican Myung-Whun Chung powers the LSO through a Czech night



TOMORROW

How is Paul McCartney's new 'Fame' school doing? We sit in on lessons at the Liverpool Institute

Making more of the Thames is a priority for the millennium. But which schemes are feasible? Marcus Binney reports

How to revive London's river

You hear the call on every side. London's great millennium project must be the revival of the River Thames. There is a frenzy of projects for building new bridges and new Thames landmarks, as well as reviving old ones. Some of the biggest names in British architecture are involved. The question is: will anything be done? It all depends on one man:

John Gummer, the Secretary of State for the Environment, who, wearing his hat as Minister for London, wants to take all the decisions himself. Gummer holds sway by virtue of his power to "call in" planning applications, announce inquiries and decide the outcome — accepting or rejecting his inspectors' recommendations as he sees fit. He has forced everyone, first

by approving a hotly disputed proposal by Sir Richard Rogers to build a multi-storey apartment block beside Battersea Old Church, thereby alienating en bloc Conservative voters across the river in Chelsea. Then, days later, he announced an inquiry into the proposed Tower Bridge Opera House (which no one had objected to, killing off the project just as Credit Lyonnais had found a private investor to finance it).

In the giddy Eighties, developers accepted inquiries as a matter of course. Today people simply back away. The Royal Opera House reckoned it would add a minimum of a year and £100,000 to the bill.

Almost all current Thames projects are potentially contentious and candidates for ministerial intervention. For example, the architect Will Alsop has a daring plan to move the ICA from the Mall to a gallery constructed on the columns of old Blackfriars railway bridge. Beside it, he proposes a glass canopy over the modern railway bridge, ingeniously transforming it into a station, serving both sides of the river. But the new station, although transparent, could interrupt views of St Paul's Cathedral. Similar objections could be made to all the proposals for elegant pedestrian bridges, such as Richard Horden's ingenious scheme for an inhabited bridge from Bankside to St Paul's, and to Sir Michael Hopkins's ingenious scheme for a cable car across the Thames from Covent Garden to the Festival Hall.

If the whole Thames initiative is not to be hamstringed, we need some smaller projects. One of the best additions to the



Could the Thames in central London once more carry a bustling riverboat trade, as it did when this late 19th-century photograph was taken?

Thames is the Buddhist pagoda built by visiting monks on the Battersea Park promenade. Why not a series of intriguing and colourful landmarks on this scale? They would be the modern-day equivalent of the towers and follies in 18th-century parks and the arches erected to celebrate coronations. They could be built on temporary licences. If the public liked them, they could stay. Hopkins has another good thought on these lines — for pontoon gardens floating on the river in front of Somerset House and The Temple. If the first was a success, more could be built, with bars and cafés.

These provide some of the most beautiful vistas along the river. Stand in the middle of Albert Bridge and you would hardly know you were in London. Splendid mature trees line both banks until the

Thames curves out of sight. Turn around, and the trees continue on the north side, but not on the south side where there is a dismal cluster of apartment blocks. Build a new embankment wall here, no more than 15 feet or so high, and another stretch of the Thames could be green for centuries to come.

We need to bring the Thames to life at night. Albert and Tower Bridges are superbly lit, but much of the river is dark at night. A few lights shining down on the water from a new pedestrian bridge would give Londoners a glimpse of the twinkling fish we never see. And think what a sculptor, such as Michael Pye, who designed the waterfall facade of the British Pavilion at the Seville Expo, could do simply with choreographed vertical jets of water lit by changing coloured lights.

In previous centuries, there was a fantastic amount to see on the Thames. "Such a forest of masts for miles together that you think all the ships of the universe here assembled," said Tobias Smollett.

The key issue is how to revive the water traffic. "Regular passenger services are not feasible," says David Jeffrey, chief executive of the Port of London Authority. "It is not possible to make the Thames semi-tidal or non-tidal above the Thames Barrier. It would flood London. You would lose all the fish and the wildlife in and on the river." Strong stuff. But others are not so sure.

Malcolm Drummond, author of the visionary plan for a new high-masted royal yacht, points out that the narrow arches of old London Bridge acted as a weir, leaving calmer water above and below. "Read Pepsy and you will see that

most people got out of their boats at London Bridge and let the watermen plunge through, then got in on the other side," he says.

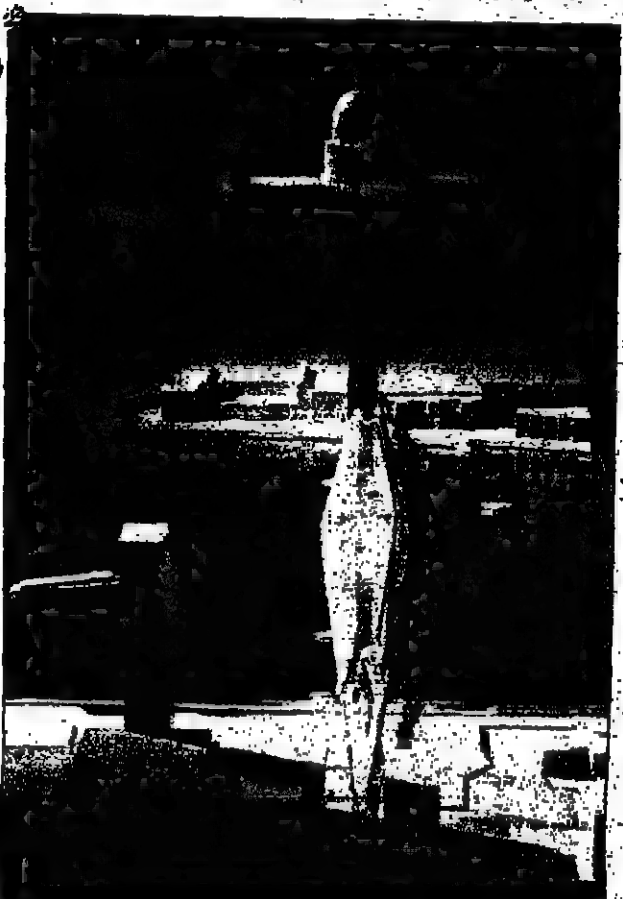
A key question is whether devices such as fish ladders could be used to keep the river alive. "At the moment the tide is too fast for a waterbus service," says Drummond. "Going down to Greenwich on the ebb and returning on the flood does not provide a proper timetable."

In the year 2000 there is the exciting possibility of holding the Lord Mayor's Show on the Thames. The City's livery companies can bring the river to life with pageantry. This year Drummond becomes Prime Minister of the Fishmongers' Company. He says: "Six companies should be racing on the Thames this summer with newly-built cutters — 30ft gigs which can be

converted into ceremonial barges with canopies." Everything depends on reconciling genuine concerns for wildlife with the opportunity to make renewed use of this once great highway. With millennium celebrations in prospect at Greenwich, whether or not the official festival is held there, the Thames could be alive again with boats.

A ride in a waterbus or water taxi should be as much part of a visit to the capital as catching a red double-decker or hailing a black cab. London's river traffic was once as bustling, varied and colourful as that of Venice or Istanbul. The city has a very long way to catch up, but that is all the more reason for starting now.

● A lecture on The Potential of the Thames will be held at 6.30pm tonight in Westminster Central Hall, SW1 (0171-332 3793)



Richard Horden's model for an inhabited bridge to St Paul's: one of several proposed new Thames bridges

CONCERTS: Spirited Prokofiev; Pletnev proves himself; a Janáček Mass

Alive and kicking

BBC SO/Gelmetti
Festival Hall

Prokofiev's Fifth Symphony in B Flat — along with the *Classical*, his best known — was written in a short space of time in the summer of 1944, although some of its material dates back to the previous decade. Much was expected of the composer: victory over Germany was imminent, and the audience that gathered for the premiere in Moscow, in January 1945, was hoping for an unequivocal expression of national pride and optimism. What Prokofiev gave them was certainly uplifting — he himself said that he conceived the work as "glorifying the human spirit". But being Prokofiev, it was anything but unequivocal.

A convincing performance of the symphony has to catch that characteristic glint of irony: there is nothing strictly comparable to the forced rejoicing of Shostakovich's Fifth, but there needs to be a constant awareness of the tensions simmering beneath the surface.

Gianluigi Gelmetti's performance with the BBC Symphony Orchestra last Thursday

night by and large did justice to the work. There may have been questionable details and occasional untidiness, but the essential spirit of the interpretation was right.

Gelmetti has a way of keeping something in reserve, so that even if one felt slightly shortchanged by the cumulative energies of the first movement as a whole, there was at least a very effective eruption waiting in the final bars.

The Scherzo, too, had a lethal kick in store for the closing moments, and although the articulation of those driving rhythms might have been a touch more incisive, Gelmetti had the sense to let the subterranean savagery reveal itself without too heavy underlining.

The pungent lyricism of the Adagio was satisfactorily captured, and the finale aptly riotous. Earlier, in the first half, Gelmetti seemed to suggest that Webern's *Pasacaglia* could be viewed as a miniature Expressionist tone poem, in a performance that played up its dramatic potential.

It would be idle to pretend that Dvořák's Violin Concerto in A Minor was as great a work as his better known Cello Concerto. Certainly there were moments in the rhapsodic first movement and in the meditative slow movement that failed to hold the attention. But it is good to hear the piece occasionally, and Uto Ughi brought to bear both a secure technique and a fine sense of lyrical fantasy.

BARRY MILLINGTON

Russian on the way up

CBSO/Pletnev
Symphony Hall, Birmingham

Mikhail Pletnev's concert with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra was well timed. Just when the audience in Symphony Hall was wondering where the next brilliant young conductor was coming from, here was a vivid demonstration that such musicians do exist. By the time the present music director's contract expires, in two years' time, Pletnev will be the same age as Sir Simon Rattle is now, and perhaps even capable of carrying on where he leaves off — although in a Russian-orientated direction.

These observations are intended neither as prophecy nor as advocacy. With a few distinguished exceptions, Russian conductors tend to be less convincing outside their national repertoire. While Pletnev the pianist is not limited in this way, Pletnev the conductor has emerged in the last two or three years largely on the strength of his interpretations of Russian music. On this occasion with the CBSO he was conducting Tchaikovsky

and Rachmaninov. But he did prove, in his minimally demonstrative way, that you don't have to be Rattle to bring out the best in the CBSO. There are others of his generation who can do the same.

Where the orchestra did not sound at its best under Pletnev's direction was in those passages in Rachmaninov's Second Symphony which failed in balance. Far too often, perhaps because Pletnev is used to a different kind of string playing, the violins carrying the melodic line were overwhelmed by the wind sections. This was all the more frustrating in that Pletnev is uncommonly persuasive in phrasing romantic melody. It did not seriously detract, on the other hand, from the long-term value of an interpretation so well calculated in structure and so effectively profiled in its climaxes. The small cut in the last movement was unnecessary.

Another exceptional quality in Pletnev is that he is prepared to take on Tchaikovsky's orchestral suites. They are not uniformly inspired, it is true, but where there is so much characteristic Tchaikovsky sound and so much authentic Tchaikovsky melody it is surely worth the occasional conscientious fugue or dainty gavotte to get at the rest. Pletnev's decision to omit the Scherzo from the Suite No 1 in D was not surprising. But it is still an interesting piece even if it is not as attractive as, say, the engagingly romantic Intermezzo or the delightfully playful Miniature March.

GERALD LARNER

Spirited canter through Czech mass

LSO/Chung
Barbican Hall

HAVING survived the fracas at the Opéra Bastille in Paris that brought his departure after a five-year stint as its music director, Myung-Whun Chung has been busily spreading his wings further afield. His migrations among the top international orchestras brought him to London for two concerts with the London Symphony Orchestra, of which the first found him unusually at home in a programme of two Czech masterpieces. His operatic experience came to the fore in Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass*, no longer an oddball curiosity, but an admired classic. The dramatic character of this Slavonic mass expresses a white-hot conviction in the Christian faith, less as a liturgical devotion than a festive celebration. The Korean conductor generated the

requisite spirit in a keen blend of voices and orchestra.

The London Symphony Chorus, with Malcolm Hicks as guest chorus master, voiced no inhibitions about getting their tongues around the original text, but the thunderous amplification of the long organ solo near the end was less to be welcomed than Catherine Edwards's virtuosic playing of it.

Vocal solos in the work are oddly disproportionate, but the Slovakian soprano Alžběta Danková from the National Theatre in Bratislava, who is

expected at Glyndebourne in 1997, made an impressive British debut with a voice of lyric fullness. She was matched for fervour by the Russian tenor Sergei Larin, while Anne-Marie Owens and Stephen Richardson contributed the shorter mezzo and bass solos to expressive effect.

An edge to the orchestra's string tone was more acceptable in the Mass than in Dvořák's D major Symphony (No 6) which preceded it. Chung drove this forward at a brisk pace, although he seemed content to express only what was obvious on the surface, except in the trio of the scherzo movement where the application of a finer brush disclosed more of the inner detail.

NOEL GOODWIN

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FILMS

Shakespeare the Hollywood way: Kenneth Branagh defends his part in the new *Othello*



VISUAL ART

The inspiration for a thousand tea towels: eccentric tributes to Constable's *The Cornfield*

THE TIMES ARTS



OPERA

Jonathan Miller provides a quizzical kind of staging for Handel's superb *Rodelinda*



POP

A veteran talent returns: Kiki Dee turns in a performance of admirable depth and passion

Away win for Handel fans

THE main hall was packed to the gunwales for Monday's semi-staged performance of Handel's opera, which must have given the driver of the last train back to town a nasty shock — a platform filled to overflowing suggested a football match that no one had warned him about.

Operagoers are of course better behaved than most football supporters, but only just. The evening started with some aggro from the crowd when the conductor, Nicholas Kraemer, drew attention to the programme and then someone doused the lights. Angry protests from the stands, the lights came up again and we could all follow the text in authentic 18th-century style.

Jonathan Miller's semi-staging was minimalist. The singers in evening dress, all of whom had their roles by heart, sat at a table groaning with bottles of (I trust) mineral water, rose when required to take part in the action and looked on with varying degrees of interest when not. You knew someone was a wrong 'un when he sang an aria with his hands in his pockets.

Rodelinda (1725) comes from one of Handel's great periods, immediately after *Giulio Cesare* and *Tamerlano*. As so often, you spend the first act thinking what a jolly good opera composer he was. Then, in the second and third, he throws aria after aria at you of such prodigious musical invention and dramatic insight that you realise he was beyond doubt one of

OPERA
Rodelinda
Blackheath
Concert Halls

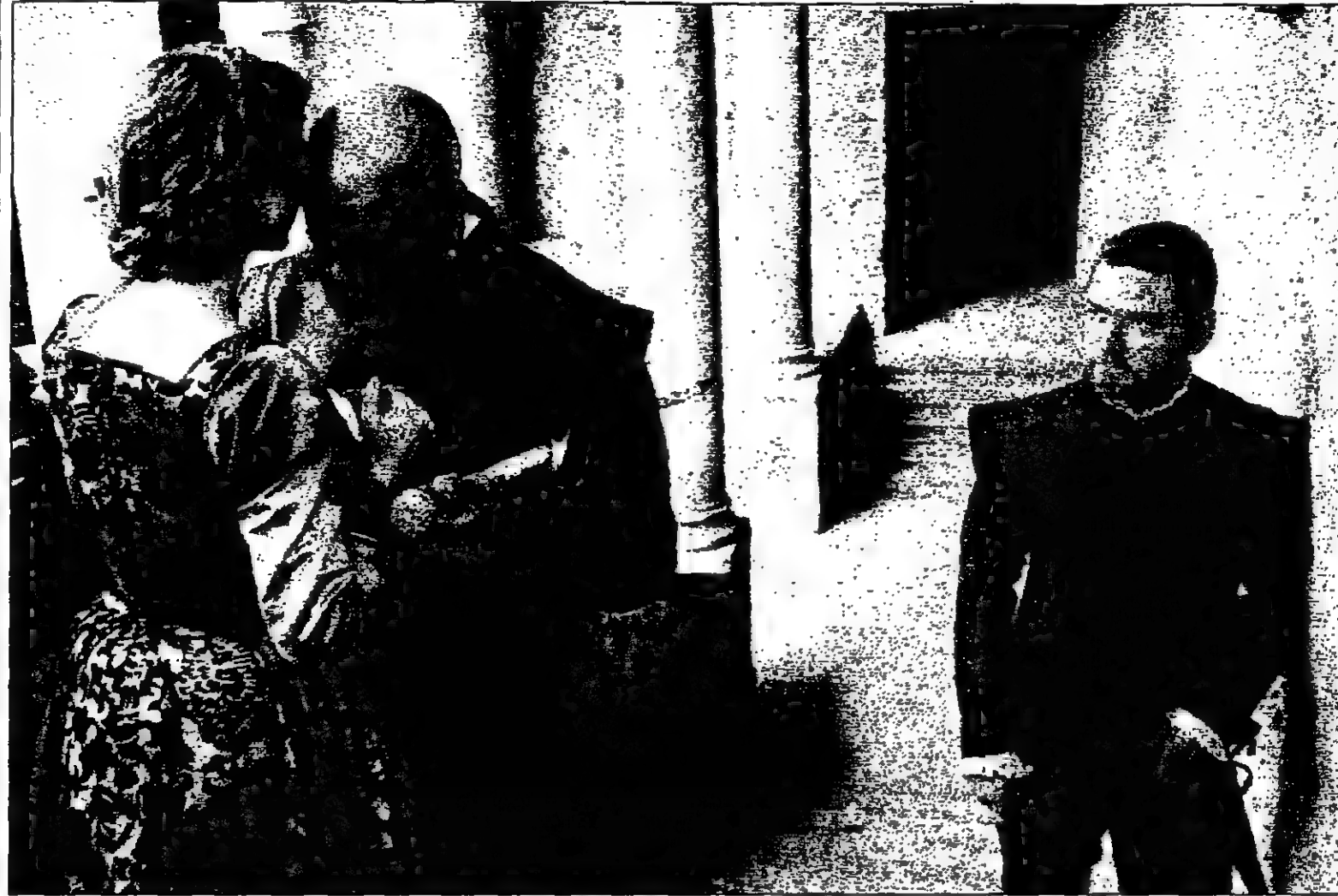
the form's founding and ever-presiding genius. He was especially good at villains — and there are two here, with slythery vocal lines and jagged progressions to show their twisted mental processes.

Inspired by Kraemer's buoyant conducting, the fine cast did the score proud, especially two outstanding counter-tenors from the new generation whose ease of voice production demands that you dub them sopranos who happen to be men. Daniel Taylor sang the Senesino role of Bertarido with astonishing purity of tone and musicianship, and Robin Blaze his faithful squire equally easily.

Catherine Robbin's velvety, crisply defined mezzo was perfect for the wronged Edulga. Christopher Purves made an appropriately in-your-face baddie as Garibaldo, and Adrian Thompson, while not in steady voice, drew a fine portrait of the usurper Grimoaldo who sees the error of his ways. Sophie Daneman, sang beautifully but seemed a little polite for a lady who has a pair of villains to defy and thinks she has lost her husband not just once, but twice.

RODNEY MILNES

Moor sex and violence



Central figures in "a relationship that produces violence": Desdemona (Irene Jacob), Othello (Laurence Fishburne) and Iago (Kenneth Branagh)

To the purist, cinematic treatment of any one of Shakespeare's plays may seem like a crime not unlike turning the Globe Theatre into a Disney theme park. But to Kenneth Branagh, who has more or less made a career out of demystifying, rescuing and reinterpreting the works of the Bard for mass consumption, it is what the man himself would have wanted.

If Shakespeare were alive today, Branagh suggests, he would be perched high in the Hollywood Hills, penning his latest script directly for the cinema screen. "He would probably be on the Internet too," Branagh says. And it is true that many of the plays have all the elements of a contemporary blockbuster.

Little wonder, then, that Hollywood producers are jostling to turn out Shakespeare films in unprecedented quantities: currently there are three *Romeo and Juliet* productions, Branagh's own *Hamlet*, two versions of *Richard III* and a Quentin Tarantino adaptation of *Macbeth*. The latter should be a special treat for Shakespearean scholars.

But Branagh contends that none is more appropriate to cinematic treatment than *Othello*, with its themes of love, murder, jealousy, betrayal and racism. Forget the tragedy tag: its director, Oliver Parker, is now happy to sell *Othello* to audiences on the basis that it is an "erotic thriller".

Branagh, who has produced, directed and acted in screen versions of *Henry V* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, this time confines his contribution solely to performance: he plays the villain Iago with charm-coated malice. He does not balk at the director's description of the latest *Othello* any more than he does at what others might perceive as the bastardisation of the Bard's work.

Kenneth Branagh tells Martyn Palmer why he is happy to star in an *Othello* described by its director as an 'erotic thriller'

"*Othello* is an interesting example of how directly Shakespeare can speak to people," he says. "I don't think anybody needs any qualifications — for having the chance to enjoy the movie — other than having been in love, perhaps, and understanding that with that goes mild or extreme forms of jealousy from time to time."

"It isn't about politics or kings and queens. It is about a very simple, triangular domestic relationship that produces domestic violence, something that is with us now and has been for 400 years. Shakespeare seems to have been on to that, and to have had a view on almost every human situation there is."

Branagh believes that Shakespeare on film can speak directly to young minds in a way that dusty school textbooks cannot. "I get letters from teachers and children who say, and I agree with them, that on the page it does not live in the same way. It is only fully alive when it is embodied by actors. It very much lives in performance."

In the new film version *Othello* comes with 60 per cent of the original text cut away and new scenes added: very different from the classic Olivier film, which remained heavily anchored in a stage production. But the new movie remains a period piece, beautifully filmed at the lush locations

of Venice and Bracciano Castle to the north of Rome, but with a contemporary flavour.

The \$11-million production, funded by an American company, only got the green light when Branagh's bankable name was attached to it. But Branagh says that this new *Othello* is very much Parker's vision. He is the son of the former British Rail boss Sir Peter Parker; his brother Nathaniel plays Cassio. The director believes that the tragedy had to be "re-invested with passion and romance".

A first-time feature director who played Iago in repertory six years ago, he admits that he cut down on Shakespeare's text to emphasise what he terms the "thriller" aspect of *Othello*. "Once I decided I was thinking cinematically it was actually quite liberating, because it is a different medium," he says. "You would do it a disservice if you did it with the original text. Shakespeare didn't write it for film and if he had done so he would have written it differently."

"If he was around now I'm sure he would be using visual imagery more. Words were his weapon at the time, but now it's different. I was trying to be true to the spirit of it rather than the specific text."

Branagh agrees that it is the filmmaker's job to re-evaluate classic work. "It must be fuelled by the film-maker's

response to the play," he says. "Oliver's script was full of that on every page. There is a sense of atmosphere and a sense of what he wanted to convey. He knew what he was doing."

"Oliver's film of *Othello* is very much a recording of a theatrical performance. It is much less cinematic than the Orson Welles 1951 film, which was a bit of a trailblazer: irreverent, if you like, in the way it was put together. And Oliver Parker's version of *Othello* does speak directly to an audience on a visceral level. It doesn't bring historical baggage with it. It lives absolutely now."

In America, critical response to the film has been mixed. *The New Yorker* called it "trash", the *Los Angeles Times* said it was "refreshingly unpretentious". But Branagh's performance has received excellent reviews.

"I've seen the play lots of times and had been in it once before, as Cassio," he says. "It's always good for an actor to play a villain, especially somebody who, by the end, seems devoid of remorse and regret, someone who has developed an intoxicating glee with the idea of manipulating people."

More Branagh Shakespeare is on the way. His own screen version of *Hamlet*, with himself in the lead and a cast that includes John Gielgud, Jack Lemmon, Charlton Heston, Billy Crystal, Gérard Philipe, Rufus Sewell, Derek Jacobi, Julie Christie and even Ken Dodd (as Yorick) is in production in Britain.

"The greatest straight part ever written," is how Branagh describes the Prince of Denmark. "It would be very hard for me to persuade an actor to do it the way that I'd like, given that it fits into a view of the play which is very particular. So yes, now I'm doing it all over again. How stupid is that?"

● *Othello* will be reviewed tomorrow and opens on Friday

A voice for all seasons

AS TALK turns towards next week's Brit Awards and the paucity of female talent suggested by another uninspiring list of nominees in that category, here was an evening of timely encouragement. Some 30 years after her recording debut and 15 after her last solo chart appearance, one of Britain's most seasoned but, lately, under-celebrated vocalists is back in the running.

Kiki Dee's return to recording and live work is, to say the most of it, understated. Last autumn, the Ticket-Box label released the splendid but almost entirely overlooked *Almost Naked*, an "unplugged" concert album on which she was accompanied only by guitarist Carmelo Luggeri. This show reprised that record, as a healthy Jazz Café turnout of old fans and inquisitive newcomers was treated to almost two hours of versatility that even her chart years only hinted at.

Assured indeed is the performer who, edging back towards the mainstream, feels no obligation to rush into her hits. Dee: elegant in long coat

Kiki Dee
Jazz Café

and winning smile, fashioned the set around unfamiliar songs, some of them of her own composition and all showing an admirable absence of cliché.

See *Me Through*, she told us with typical Yorkshire openness, "was written 'in about five minutes after a date with a bloke I quite fancied'. You won't see *Me Crying*, another original, eloquently expressed the fragility of a flit lover's survival instincts. But it was Dee's adaptability that gave the performance such depth. One struggles to think of many other singers who could interpret songs by Jane Siberry, Willy Dixon, the Young Rascals and Smokey Robinson with uniform dexterity. Siberry's irreverent *Miss Punta Blanca* and Dixon's deep-blues *Spoonful* were unlikely bedfellows, but benefited from Dee's fluid, unhurried approach and Luggeri's equally flexible accompaniment, as did the Rascals' *Good Lovin'* and Robinson's *Ain't That Peculiar*.

With such delicacies in the mixture, the references to several of her own past achievements formed a rich icing. *Don't Go Breaking My Heart* underwent an acoustic deconstruction. *Amoureuse* was once again an exquisite love song and *Loving and Free* helped further to emphasise that the stock of this crafts-woman has long been seriously undervalued.

PAUL SEXTON

Wheeling and able

EACH performance by CandoCo is remarkable: wheels spinning, chairs spiralling like bicycles, people balancing on one leg or one hand. This may sound like a bunch of circus acrobats, but CandoCo actually consists of able-bodied and wheelchair-using dancers.

CandoCo owes its success not just to novelty: its performers are talented and have a repertoire of a calibre conventional companies should seek to emulate. Rather than suffocating creativity, the physical restrictions and wheelchairs seem to have stimulated most choreographers to an inspired inventiveness.

This rule holds firm with the handsome new piece, *You Are Now Entering the State of Love*, shown as part of CandoCo's two sold-out London performances. Lea Parkinson, one of the company's male dancers, has devised an imaginative duet for Sue Smith and David Toole. The piece begins with images of the heavens, the sea and the remarkably broad hands which — for those familiar with CandoCo — belong unmistakably to Toole. When John Henderson's sensitive lighting plot brightens the stage, Toole's singular

DANCE
CandoCo
Queen Elizabeth Hall

shape becomes evident, offering the illusion of being half man and half machine. His long, powerful arms sweep sideways with the dramatic breadth of an eagle's wingspan, enabling him to walk, twist and balance in extraordinary feats of virtuosity.

Lea Parkinson partnered the wheelchair-dancer Celeste Dandeker in *Darshan Singh Bhuller's Once Upon a Time in England* and most of the company assembled for their popular energiser, *Back to Front With Side Shows* by Emilyn Claid.

In this scheme, Toole is the centre, with his vivid, significant glances and blazing physical effort, though, has taken its toll, and he is retiring to start a film career. With so many pieces tailored to his unique abilities, his departure will leave CandoCo with a gaping hole in its repertoire.

NADINE MEISNER

DANCE

CandoCo
Queen Elizabeth Hall

‘This version speaks to an audience on a visceral level’

Call of the Cam



to the Corn Exchange for English Touring Opera's production of Massenet's romantic tragedy, *Werther*. After breakfast on Saturday morning there is a visit — by punt! — to the picturesque village of Grantchester, setting for Rupert Brooke's famous poem *The Old Vicarage* (now home to Lord Archer). Near to the Old Vicarage are the incomparable Orchard Tea Gardens, where Stephen Medcalf, ETO's director of productions, will join you to give a talk about Saturday evening's opera, Verdi's magnificent *Rigoletto*. The weekend finishes after breakfast on Sunday.

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THIS WEEK'S OTHER OFFERS

LONDON
Criterion Theatre
March 5-17
● AFTER a sell-out world tour, the Reduced Shakespeare Company returns with *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (abridged). All 37 of Shakespeare's plays are presented in just 97 minutes, including Titus Andronicus as a galloping gourmet and a rap *Othello*. Best available seats £15 (normally £20) for any performance except Saturday evening. Tel 0171-369 1747

SOUTH SHIELDS
The Customs House
Feb 20, 21
● TWO tickets for the price of one (normally £7.50 to £9.50) for the gripping horror story, *The Woman in Black*. Tel 0191-454 1234

BRIGHTON
Theatre Royal
Feb 21
● TWO tickets for the price of one (normally £12.50) for John Godber's comedy, *Lucky Sods*. Tel 01273 328-888

EDINBURGH
Traverse Theatre
Feb 28
● TWO tickets for the price of one (normally £7) to *The Architect*, David Greig's cut-

ting portrait of one man and his dysfunctional family. Tel 0131-226 1404

CHELTHAM
Everyman Theatre
Feb 19-24
● TWO tickets for the price of one (normally £4.50 to £15.50) to see the adaptation of Stephen King's psychological thriller, *Misery*. Tel 01323 413000

PLYMOUTH
Pavilion Theatre
Feb 26, 27
● TWO tickets for the price of one (normally £7) to Nick Discombe's bitter-sweet *Halfway to Paradise*. Tel 01752 229922

LEATHERHEAD
Theatrical Theatre
Feb 28, 29; Mar 1, 4-6
● SAVE £3 on top-price tickets (normally £16) for Feydeau's wickedly funny play, *Emily Needs Attention*, starring Felicity Kendal. Tel 01572 377677

BOLTON
Octagon Theatre
Mar 3, 5, 22
● TWO tickets for the price of one (normally £3.75 to £12.50) for Arthur Miller's powerful drama, *A View From the Bridge*. Tel 09204 520661

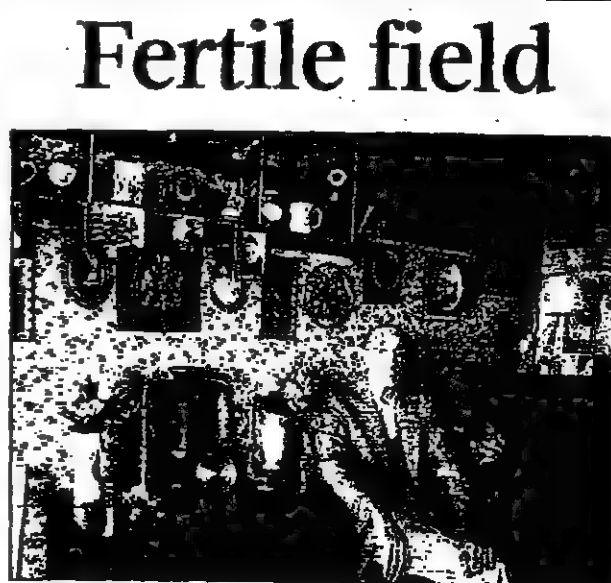
A new exhibition celebrates the enduring appeal of a Constable landscape

When John Constable wrote, in a letter to a friend dated April 8, 1826, "I do hope to sell this present picture — as it has certainly got a little more eye-salve than I usually descend to give them," he set *The Cornfield* on its journey through history. And it is the journey, as much as the picture, that is celebrated in a fascinating exhibition at the National Gallery from today.

At *Home with Constable's Cornfield* features not only the original, which has been at the Gallery since 1837, but a selection of reproductions, plates, tea-trays, clocks, cushions, thimbles and biscuit tins, onto which the image has found its way in the last 170 years. With each item there is a photograph of its owner, and a statement about their relationship with the object, and the image on it.

The curator Colin Painter, of the Wimbledon School of Art, came upon the idea for the exhibition while working on his PhD thesis in Newcastle in the early 1980s. "I was going into all sorts of houses and taking photographs," he says, "and the only area of decorative commonality, across all social groups and incomes, was Constable."

"A lot of people are angry about contemporary art, and this exhibition is partly about ways in which art could find



Jim Nippess: fears for the future of the countryside

its way into people's homes more. *The Cornfield* is very suitable because of characteristics that make it particularly appealing: the countryside, the peace and tranquillity — things we have lost, that make the picture 'relevant' in an environmental sense."

This point is echoed by Mrs Elizabeth Peit, whose fire-screen is one of Professor Painter's favourite exhibits. She was one of 500 people who responded to a notice placed next to the painting in the National Gallery which re-

quested the loan of related objects from members of the public. "I am 60 now, and when I was young there was a lot of countryside around London. The picture reminds me of a walk I used to take on Sundays just after the war, from Sidcup to Chislehurst. The lane even turned the same way as in the picture, but it has all been built up now."

"It has been my favourite picture since my mother gave me a birthday card with it on as a teenager. I saw the

original for the first time last February and thought it rather orange, much more like a copy my husband once bought me than the fire-screen."

For retired handyman Jim Nippess, who lives on the fourteenth floor of a tower block near Heathrow, and has a reproduction, it is the dog that is important. He is not allowed to have one. But he does have urban angst about the countryside. "Youngsters today will never see things like that picture. It'll all be taken up with concrete buildings and roads."

Another exhibitor, Andrew Smith, had it on the landing at home as a child, and his brother claimed to be the boy in the picture. Andrew wanted it to be him — and found as he grew up that he always measured himself in terms of the drinking boy.

Professor Painter insists that "when they talk about the picture, they talk about their lives". He complains that, "I say 'I like *The Cornfield*' because it reminds me of Suffolk" is not considered a relevant way to talk about art. "It may, however, be a way to make art more relevant."

GILES COREN

● At *Home with Constable's Cornfield* is at the National Gallery, Trafalgar Square, London WC2 (0171-559 3321) until April 21

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Irish raider can confirm Champion Chase favouritism

Sound Man to hit right note

By Robert Wright

ON Saturday at Newbury Viking Flagship served notice that he is ready to defend his Champion Chase crown. Today at Ascot the young pretender, Sound Man, attempts to confirm his position as favourite to take over the title.

Sound Man has not run since impressively winning the Tingle Creek Chase at Sandown in December and his trainer, Edward O'Grady, is using today's contest to sharpen up his eight-year-old for the Champion Chase.

O'Grady said yesterday: "It hasn't been easy with the bad weather recently, but I can't grumble too much because it's been the same for everybody. However, the others have had more races recently than Sound Man and they might have a fitness advantage."

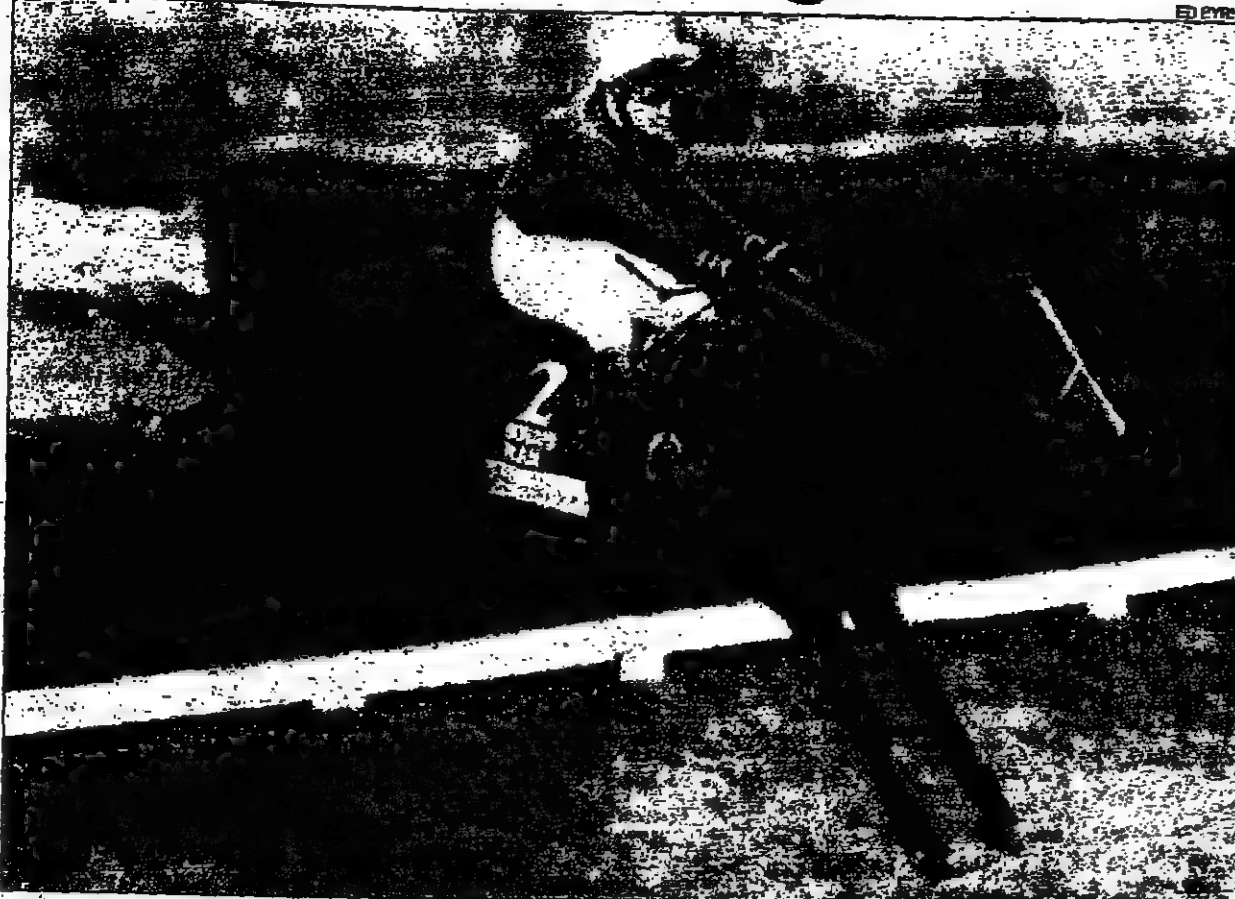
"He won't be at concert pitch because Cheltenham is the target, but I certainly believe he will give a good account of himself."

With Storm Alert best over two miles, the main danger to the Irish raider should be Poulton, who reverts to his optimum trip after failing to say in the King George.

However, Sound Man has gone from strength to strength this season, winning all four parts, and it will be a major surprise if he is beaten.

While Sound Man will start prohibitive odds, the other two televised races are more open. The Sheny Enterprise hurdle is fascinating, in spite of only six horses racing from handicap proper.

Buckhouse Boy and Angels Double are the informants, and are both 9/10 out of the handicap and have yet to prove that they stay three



Sound Man, winning the Tingle Creek Chase at Sandown, returns to Britain for today's Comet Chase at Ascot

miles. The latter, shapes as though this trip will suit and is sure to go well.

Hebridean returns to hurdles after falling on his last two starts over fences, while Simpson, Seekin Cash, Balestani and Top Spin have been below their best recently.

Sound Man's stable companion, Time For A Run, has failed to take to fences this season, and will appreciate the return to the smaller obsta-

cles. He put up a tremendous performance when third under top weight in last year's Coral Cup at the Cheltenham Festival, and a repeat of that effort would give O'Grady and Dunwoody a valuable double.

The Reynoldstown Novices Chase has attracted a top quality field and will have a major bearing on the Sun Alliance Chase at the Festival. St Mellion Fairway has been entered for the Gold Cup by

his trainer, David Nicholson, but his form amounts to little more than a "prospect" and, as yet, he has much to prove. Ladbroke's offer of 6-1 this morning is far too short.

Mr Mulligan is favourite in some lists for the Sun Alliance, and has impressed in two starts over fences. He must be respected, but has a 7/10 penalty to overcome. He is preferred to Major Summit, who is also unbeaten over fences, but

jumped stickily at Sandown last time.

In the top races horses from smaller yards are often overpriced, and that appears to be the case here. John O'Shea's Go Ballistic put up much his best effort when stepped up in trip over course and distance last time, being collared close home by Hill Of Tullow. Likely to be held up even longer today, Go Ballistic can dent some large reputations.

00 Landed Gentry 3.05 Sound Man
30 Mole Board 3.35 Lord Gyllene
40 Narnum 4.05 Dyle
50 Angelo's Double 4.35 Claymore Lad

Time Private Handicapper's top rating: 3.35 Mole Mulligan

00 KILFANE CONDITIONAL JOCKEYS' HURDLE (2.55, 2m 4f) (11 runners)

1-4000 Landed Gentry 2.55 (11) 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Reprimand for Rioch on eve of big match

By Peter Ball

THESE are interesting times for Bruce Rioch. Yesterday, he was warned as to his future conduct by the Football Association; this evening, Aston Villa stand between him and a visit to Wembley in his first season as Arsenal manager.

The connection between the two events is a strong one — the Coca-Cola Cup. Rioch had a heated disagreement on the touchline with Terry McDermott, the Newcastle United assistant manager, in a passionate match that took Arsenal to a semi-final meeting with Villa, with the first leg at Highbury tonight. Rioch was censured and warned that a repeat would bring a stronger response.

Even with a visit to Wembley and entry to Europe as the prize, quite why a second-string competition should evoke such passions is difficult to fathom, particularly for Rioch. As a manager he is known more for his insistence on discipline than for confrontation, but the pressures of life at Highbury have been emerging recently with the signing

"Paul McGrath is a great player and will continue to be so for Aston Villa," Little said. "He will be in the 14 at Highbury, but I haven't decided yet whether he will play. I have to make sure I pick the right side because it's a massive game for the club."

If the Coca-Cola Cup for once overshadows the FA Cup, the confused state of the senior competition will at last become clearer after an appealing group of outstanding fourth-round matches tonight, both the Cup holders, Everton, and West Ham United are at risk against teams from the Endleigh Insurance League in their replays.

Everton travel to Port Vale with serious doubts about the fitness of Duncan Ferguson, who strained his groin in the win on Saturday over Manchester City. Ferguson posed the main problem to Port Vale in the original game at Goodison Park and his absence could help to tilt the game in Port Vale's favour.

If Ferguson does miss the match, Daniel Amokachi will deputise. There are doubts, too, about Joe Parkinson, but Ebbwell is available after a two-match suspension and Andrei Kanchelskis returns after playing for Russia in Malta.

West Ham won much admiration as well as three points at Tottenham Hotspur on Monday; playing at Grimsby Town 48 hours later will be a different proposition, particularly with Dani and Bilic ineligible — always assuming that the internal strife on Saturday has not undermined Grimsby's challenge.

Leeds United, who are already ahead at the halfway stage in their Coca-Cola Cup semi-final, tonight turn their attention to the FA Cup, when their twice-postponed tie with Bolton takes place. With Ford passing a fitness test but Pemberton and Johnson still missing, Leeds are likely to be unchanged from the side that counter-attacked so well at St Andrew's on Sunday. Bolton know that this game is their last chance to rescue something from a depressing season.

Steve Claridge, the Birmingham City striker, could be ready to leave St Andrews after a breakdown in talks over a new three-year contract yesterday. The 29-year-old, who was Birmingham's leading scorer with 25 goals last season, has attracted the interest of a string of clubs, including Chelsea, Charlton Athletic and Leicester City. Claridge cost Birmingham £350,000 when he joined from Cambridge United in January 1994.

of David Platt under scrutiny and a run of only four wins in their past 14 games. A return to the Coca-Cola Cup final, in which his Bolton Wanderers side played last year with a style they have lacked since promotion, would ease some of those pressures.

Rioch said yesterday: "We have to make sure we can take a good advantage with us when we travel to Villa park in two weeks' time."

Arsenal will again be without Adams, Platt and Parlor and Rioch is hoping that Bergkamp, the Holland international forward, will provide the inspiration. "Every successful team needs players of instinctive ability that can turn a game," Rioch said. "The only thing Dutch about their win against Newcastle was the use of the dog, but that may be less effective against Villa."

"They are a very strong side defensively," Bergkamp said. So strong that Brian Little, the Villa manager, was still undecided yesterday whether to bring back Paul McGrath tonight. McGrath missed the win at Bolton on Saturday, Steve Staunton performing impressively on the left side of three centre backs in his stead.

That is also true for Coventry City and Manchester City — at least until Sunday, when the winners of the replay at Maine Road visit Old Trafford. "I'd sooner be where we are in the League and still in the Cup than be halfway up the Premiership and out of the Cup," Alan Ball, the Manchester City manager, said yesterday.

□ Birmingham City appear closer to being made to play a game behind closed doors with the Football Association indicating its attitude was hardening to the throwing of coins and a snooker ball on to the pitch during the Coca-Cola Cup semi-final, first leg defeat by Leeds United on Sunday.

The Leeds captain, Gary McAllister, was struck by a missile.



Bilic gets the better of Sheringham during West Ham's victory over Tottenham at White Hart Lane on Monday

West Ham indebted to foreign legion

Russell Kempson on the new faces helping Harry Redknapp's team towards Premiership safety

WEST Ham United's third successive FA Cup Premier League victory — 1-0 against Tottenham Hotspur at White Hart Lane on Monday — should have banished any lingering fears of relegation at Upton Park. Now in their 13th place, eight points clear of the drop zone, it would take a serious reversal of fortune for them to be dragged back into the mire.

However, for Harry Redknapp, the West Ham manager, it was still a night of mixed emotions. Dani, the Portuguese forward, and Slaven Bilic, the Croatian central defender, made their full debuts in claret and blue and responded with polished performances in an alien environment, while the Dumitrescu, the Romanian, remains entangled in the tentacles of the Department of Employment.

Dani, 19, scored the winning goal after only four minutes, nodding in from close range after Ian Walker, the Tottenham goalkeeper, had parried a shot from Dicks almost straight on to the striker's head. "The pitch was not good, it was very tiring," Dani, who

was replaced by Tony Cottee in the 67th minute, said. "I am not used to that sort of surface but the team worked hard and I enjoyed it."

Bilic, playing his first game for two months, slotted in alongside Marc Rieper at the heart of the West Ham defence. "We passed the ball beautifully but maybe we should score more goals," Bilic, a £1.65 million signing from Karlsruhe, in Germany, said. "It was very quick, very competitive, something which surprised me, but I think I coped okay."

Yet it was the absence of Dumitrescu, another of West Ham's recent influx of foreign players, that cast a shadow over Redknapp's contentment. As if mocking the Department's decision to refuse him a work permit, after his £1.5 million move from White Hart Lane, the match programme still had him listed

at No 8 in the Tottenham squad. "We can bring in any player who doesn't need a permit, but he is a class player with 52 international caps," Redknapp said. "Because he didn't fit into Tottenham's side, it doesn't mean he can't fit into mine." West Ham have launched a vigorous appeal against the decision, the result of which is likely to be announced early next week.

Though Tottenham also played a vibrant role in a match of numerous goal attempts and retained fifth place in the Premiership, their third defeat in six league outings again questioned their ability to qualify for next season's UEFA Cup.

"We were disappointed in the first half but I thought we came back well after the break," Gerry Francis, the manager, said. Equally worrying was the failure of Teddy Sheringham and

Chris Armstrong to add to their joint tally of 34 goals. It was their third consecutive blank in the Premiership.

At the County Ground, Martin Ling helped to ease the jumbled FA Cup fixture list when his last-minute goal gave Swindon Town a 1-0 victory over Oldham Athletic in their much-delayed fourth-round tie. Ling had been on the pitch only 12 minutes as a replacement for Steve McMahon, the Swindon player-manager, who had dropped him before the game.

Had Oldham shown a more adventurous approach, Graeme Sharp, the manager, might have been contemplating a fifth-round place instead of McMahon, his former Everton colleague. "It's no consolation to lose to an old mate," Sharp said. "Steve did a good job, sitting in midfield and taking all his experience. I didn't think Swindon hurt us that much, but perhaps we didn't do enough going forward." Swindon, the Endleigh Insurance League second division leaders, also missed a penalty in the fifth minute.

Jones is fined again after attack on Gullit

By Our Sports Staff

VINNIE JONES received a heavy fine from the Football Association (FA) for the fifth time in three years yesterday. The Wimbledon midfielder player's criticism, in a newspaper column, of Ruud Gullit in particular and foreign footballers in general cost him £2,000 and took his recent contributions to Lancaster Gate's coffers to £26,250.

The FA said it had considered banning Jones, but a spokesman, Steve Double, added: "He was hit in the pocket rather than with a suspension because we accepted that Wimbledon did not have any control over the article, or him."

Jones claimed that Chelsea's former Holland international had tricked the referee into sending him off for the twelfth time in his career during Wimbledon's Boxing Day win at Stamford Bridge. Jones wrote to the FA offering his apologies and regrets, and turning down the offer of a personal hearing into the dispute charge.

He then paid out £1,750 last year on a misconduct charge for swearing at Kevin Keegan, the Newcastle manager, after a match, but escaped sanctions when he was reported to the FA for biting the nose of a journalist in a bar in Dublin.

Giovanni Trapattoni, one of the most successful coaches in Italian football history, resigned from Cagliari, the struggling Serie A club, yesterday after their weekend thrashing by Juventus, his old employers.

Trapattoni, winner of an unrivalled six league titles with Juventus and one with Internazionale, had quit a club

without completing a full season in charge. "When I arrived at the club this morning I did not expect to have to hand in my resignation," Trapattoni said. Trapattoni, who joined Cagliari last summer after a disappointing season with Bayern Munich, said he had decided to quit after meeting club officials and realising he no longer had their full backing.

"I now realise I acted hastily in accepting this job," he said, "above all when I promised ambitious targets."

Sorensen happy to sign new contract

By Our Sports Staff

KURT SORENSSEN has been confirmed as the Worthington coach for the inaugural season of rugby league's Super League. Worthington, who has debts approaching £1 million, were last week taken over by Bob Jamieson, a Scotland-based sports marketing consultant.

The takeover delayed negotiations with Sorensen, who has now signed a new, one-year deal. "I'm pleased that my future has been decided," Sorensen, a former New Zealand international, said. "Now, we have just seven weeks to prepare for the start of Super League and I shall be reviewing the playing staff with Mr Jamieson to see what we have and whether we can make any more signings."

Sorensen, who enjoyed a successful playing career with Widnes, had a spell as player-coach with Whitehaven before taking over at Derwent Park from Peter Walsh at the start of the shortened centenary season. However, Worthington had a disappointing time in their second season back in the top division, finishing bottom, with just four wins from 20 matches, as well as being beaten by Widnes, from the first division, in the Regal Trophy and Silk Cut Challenge Cup.

"It's my impression that any coach in the game would have struggled at Worthington last season," Jamieson said. "Sorensen, who played for more than two months, is ready to return in the rescheduled Challenge Cup fifth-round tie at Dewsbury on Sunday."

The BBC will televise the sixth-round tie between Salford, who beat Wigan last Sunday, and St Helens, the favourites, on February 24.

Misconduct earns fine for Hunter

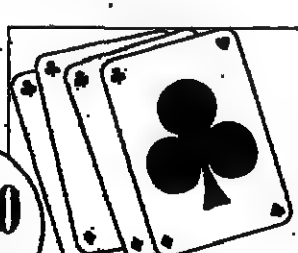
By Phil Yates

PAUL HUNTER, the first season snooker professional who reached the semi-finals of the Regal Welsh Open two weeks ago, has been fined £2,500, of which £2,000 has been suspended, by the governing body, the World Professional Billiards and Snooker Association (WPBSA).

Hunter, 17, of Leeds, was also ordered to pay £25 towards the cost of the hearing, which looked into a number of incidents at the qualifying school in Blackpool last summer. Snooker's youngest professional was found to be in breach of a ruling that requires WPBSA members to "conduct themselves in a proper manner."

Hunter, the English junk champion, was also found guilty of bringing the game into disrepute, but 80 per cent of his fine has been suspended. Unexpectedly, Mike Russell, No 1 in the world billiard rankings, escaped punishment after an alleged buntin incident during the world billiards championships in Bombay last year.

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ATHLETICS

TAMPERE, Finland: International indoor meeting. Men. 100m: 1. P. Karlsson (Swe) 10.67sec; 200m: 2. D. Brundage (US) 21.37; 400m: 1. G. Moore (Ire) 1.07; 800m: 1. M. Smith (Ire) 2:05.50; 1,000m: 1. P. Stevens (GB) 3:02.50; 1,500m: 1. P. Stevens (GB) 4:35.50; 2,000m: 1. P. Stevens (GB) 5:55.50; 2,500m: 1. P. Stevens (GB) 7:25.50; 3,000m: 1. P. Stevens (GB) 8:55.50; 3,500m: 1. P. Stevens (GB) 10:25.50; 4,000m: 1. P. Stevens (GB) 11:55.50; 4,500m: 1. P. Stevens (GB) 13:25.50; 5,000m: 1. P. Stevens (GB) 14:55.50; 5,500m: 1. P. Stevens (GB) 16:25.50; 6,000m: 1. P. Stevens (GB) 17:55.50; 6,500m: 1. P. Stevens (GB) 19:25.50; 7,000m: 1. P. Stevens (GB) 20:55.50; 7,500m: 1. P. Stevens (GB) 22:25.50; 8,000m: 1. P. Stevens (GB) 23:55.50; 8,500m: 1. P. Stevens (GB) 25:25.50; 9,000m: 1. P. Stevens (GB) 26:55.50; 9,500m: 1. P. Stevens (GB) 28:25.50; 10,000m: 1. P. Stevens (GB) 29:55.50.

BASKETBALL

CLASSIC CUP. Semi-final. First leg. Birmingham Bulls 79 London Towers 77.

BOWLS

PRESTON: Churchills Insurance world indoor championships. Singles. First round. 1. P. Stevens (GB) 1-0; 2. D. Brundage (US) 1-0; 3. G. Moore (Ire) 1-0; 4. M. Smith (Ire) 1-0; 5. P. Stevens (GB) 1-0; 6. D. Brundage (US) 1-0; 7. G. Moore (Ire) 1-0; 8. M. Smith (Ire) 1-0; 9. P. Stevens (GB) 1-0; 10. D. Brundage (US) 1-0; 11. G. Moore (Ire) 1-0; 12. M. Smith (Ire) 1-0; 13. P. Stevens (GB) 1-0; 14. D. Brundage (US) 1-0; 15. G. Moore (Ire) 1-0; 16. M. Smith (Ire) 1-0; 17. P. Stevens (GB) 1-0; 18. D. Brundage (US) 1-0; 19. G. Moore (Ire) 1-0; 20. M. Smith (Ire) 1-0; 21. P. Stevens (GB) 1-0; 22. D. Brundage (US) 1-0; 23. G. Moore (Ire) 1-0; 24. M. Smith (Ire) 1-0; 25. P. Stevens (GB) 1-0; 26. D. Brundage (US) 1-0; 27. G. Moore (Ire) 1-0; 28. M. Smith (Ire) 1-0; 29. P. Stevens (GB) 1-0; 30. D. Brundage (US) 1-0; 31. G. Moore (Ire) 1-0; 32. M. Smith (Ire) 1-0; 33. P. Stevens (GB) 1-0; 34. D. Brundage (US) 1-0; 35. G. Moore (Ire) 1-0; 36. M. Smith (Ire) 1-0; 37. P. Stevens (GB) 1-0; 38. D. 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Brundage (US) 1-0; 347. G. Moore (Ire) 1-0; 348.

Sri Lankan spectators give vent to their disgust at Australia's World Cup boycott

Match in Colombo passes off peacefully

By TUNU VARADARAJAN

IN KEEPING with the build-up to the sixth World Cup, the cricket was secondary. For the record, a combined India-Pakistan "Goodwill XI" defeated a full-strength Sri Lanka side by four wickets yesterday at the Premadasa Stadium in Colombo.

And Kumble took four wickets for 12 in a devastating eight-over spell for the combined side. Muthiah Muralitharan, bowling out of sight of the umpire, Darrell Hair, was not thought to have chucked a single off break. Asharuddin captained the visiting team. Indulhab Alam managed it, no one died — and the lively crowd, grateful for the cricket they received, chanted untiringly.

In their fullest throats, 10,000 Sri Lankan supporters gave the Australians the bird, a pattern that may repeat itself in later matches in India and Pakistan. Playing on the Urdu word for "long liver", they kept up a raucous cry: "India zindabad, Pakistan zindabad, Sri Lanka zindabad, Australia — very, very bad." There were other chants, too, thanking the visitors for their gesture of solidarity, but there was also this bitter, less amusing one: "Aussie PM is cheating."

The overwhelming flavour at the ground, however, was one of carnival. The aim of the exercise — to show the Australians that cricket can still be played in Colombo without risk of bloodstained flames — was achieved. Yet for cricket lovers, particularly for passionate ones from the subcontinent, the manner of its achievement was as striking as the aim itself.

Had India not been partitioned in 1947, leading to the creation of the new state of Pakistan, its cricket team today would be quite formidable. Not quite as formidable as it might have been in the early 1980s — when Sunil Gavaskar, Kapil Dev, Imran Khan and Javed Miandad were all at their peak — but certainly good enough to be notional favourites for the World Cup which started earlier today.

An attack of Wasim Akram, Waqar Younis, Kumble, Muthiah Muralitharan and Manoj Prabhakar would be varied and venomous. Sachin Tendulkar, Asharuddin and Imran-ul-Haq would be a stroke-filled trio of which all sides would be envious.

Aqib, Sahail, Sanjay Manjrekar, Navjot Singh, Prabhakar and wicket-keeper Rashid Latif would be a bustling supporting cast of



Test players of India and Pakistan, united in common cause, hold a team meeting during a break in play in the Premadasa Stadium. Photograph: Dexter Cruz

batsmen — and there is the ageing Miandad, an unknown quantity for perhaps the first time in his life. If the Australians, recorded more respect by the bookmakers than by Sri Lankan spectators, are 5-2 favourites to lift the cup in March, this Fantasy XI might be 2-1.

Yet the flight of fancy, propelled by yesterday's game at Colombo, ought not to stop there. How good would an all-time "All India XI" be? Who would be in it? Would it be the equal of all-time England, Australia and West Indies teams? How about this for an all-time India-Pakistan XI: Sunil Gavaskar, Hanif Mohammad, Sachin Tendulkar, Javed Miandad, Vinoo Mankad, Imran Khan (captain), Kapil Dev, Karoln Engineer, Wasim Akram, Waqar Younis and Bhagwat Chaudhary.

The side, pure fantasy, has also the purest class. It would hold its own — and more — against Mars. The venue? Why Colombo of course!

Scoreboard, page 44

Fraser keeps an anxious watch on Cork

Among the many glued to their television sets this morning as England opened their World Cup campaign was Angus Fraser, in Sharnbrook, The Midlands, training daily at his local gymnasium in case one of his former bowling colleagues should break down.

Fraser is particularly concerned about the fitness of Dominic Cork, although not with any sense of Schadenfreude. "England have to be careful with Dominic," Fraser said yesterday. "We all know that we have struggled to bowl sides out in Test cricket in recent years, but the worst thing would be to over-use Dominic."

"Since his debut last summer, he has proved himself to be a world-class bowler, but he must be given enough time to rest. We don't want him to pick up an injury that puts him out of the game for a

season or two." Fraser, speaking at a Sports Writers' Association lunch, knows what he is talking about. In the two years after making his England debut in 1989, he was so overworked that he broke down with a badly damaged hip in Australia in 1991, an injury that took him two years to get over.

Chicken Madras

Just because you are paranoid, it does not mean they are not all out to get you. The Australian players, not content with refusing to play in Sri Lanka, have now protested at the idea that they should practise in Madras, before their game against Kenya in nearby Visakhapatnam on February 23. The Australians would rather train in Bombay because they consider Madras too close to Sri Lanka. The irony is that Australia's net sessions were arranged

Simon Wilde's
WORLD CUP EXTRAS

for the local bowling academy, which is run by a certain D. K. Lillee.

Beer money

If England win the World Cup, they will receive a bonus of £90,000 from Tetley Bitter, three times the sum on offer from the organisers. This is a new customary incentive scheme on the part of the England team's principal sponsors, whose usual bonus for a Test series is a mere £50,000. A company spokesman denied any bias in favour of one-day cricket.

putting down the discrepancy to the World Cup's status as a "truly world event". The fact is, to win the recent Test series in South Africa, England needed to play well over 25 days to win the World Cup they must do so for only eight.

Hooper mystery

There were widespread fears that West Indies would be without one of their key players for the World Cup — and so it proved, even when Brian Lara agreed to join the team. But why is Carl Hooper not in it? Few insiders believe the official line that he is worried about his health. There are rumours of domestic difficulties, but one friend believes the problem goes back to long-standing difficulties with the West Indies board over schedules. "If the board had agreed to let him rest for two weeks before the tournament rather than train,

he would have gone. He is punch-drunk and has seen his commitments up to 2000 and there is not a gap in sight. The board have not been sympathetic to him for several years."

□ The West Indies captain is also believed to be suffering from burn-out. The problem is, Richie Richardson does not know how to relax. Since dropping out of the game through exhaustion in 1994, he has played virtually non-stop and might have been thought ready for a break after the World Cup and a home series against New Zealand — and so he will be, which is why he has signed to play for the Lashings club, in the Maidstone Eurosport League. "Richie likes England very much," his agent said, "particularly the London area. He wanted to spend some time over here and have a holiday."

IN BRIEF

Nemeth to leave Gordon in isolation

THE international basketball career of Trevor Gordon may be over after the England coach, Laszlo Nemeth, took a dim view of the 6ft 7in forward's request to be omitted from the squad that will prepare for its European championship visit to Moscow on February 28 with two matches against Hungary next week.

The player claimed to be suffering from "wear and tear" and wanted to concentrate on his commitment to the Birmingham Bulls, but Nemeth, allying this to Gordon's failure to turn up for a match against Denmark last month, said: "I think that his career with England has ended."

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